

Westminster Conference Endorses Sikh, Kashmiri and Naga Self-Determination

Westminster, London, 12 May 2011: India's current temporary UN Security Council seat should serve as an opportunity for the international community to force it to comply with its human rights obligations. That was the call from a major Conference hosted by 'Parliamentarians for National Self-Determination' (PNSD) which also endorsed the right of Sikh, Kashmiri and Naga self-determination in their homelands, as well as calls for UN criminal courts to punish those who have directed or carried out gross rights violations by the state in those conflict zones.

Chairing the event, **Lord Ahmed** castigated India for its formal 'Reservation' lodged at the UN under which it purports to deny that the right of self-determination applies to the nations living in Indian controlled territory. The UN's own Human Rights Committee has demanded India withdraws its infamous 'Reservation' against Article 1 of the 1966 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which grants "all peoples the right to self-determination"; it goes on to provide that "by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development". He said the recent cases of East Timor and South Sudan were ample evidence that the international community had accepted the application of this right as a means to end conflict; yet India seems intent on continuing the blood letting in Kashmir, Punjab, Nagalim and elsewhere, where it has opted instead for massive human rights violations as a means of crushing legitimate movements for freedom.

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Chair of the All Party Hurriet Conference participated in the event via telephone link from occupied Kashmir and detailed India's breach of its commitment to the UN and to Kashmiris, made over 65 years ago, to allow the people of the region to decide their own destiny. He condemned India as a state drunk with military power, whose armed forces are accountable to no one in accordance with shameful black laws such as the so-called Public Safety Act, which Amnesty International has recently branded "Unlawful Law". The Hurriet leader said there was no point to the current Indo-Pak dialogue as it omits the voice of the Kashmiri people; it was a process aimed only at diverting world opinion from the core issue of Kashmiri self-determination and deserved to fail. He demanded India withdraw its armed forces from Kashmir, involve Kashmiris in the dialogue and allow the UN to supervise a plebiscite so the people themselves can shape the outcome in a peaceful manner.

Kanwarpal Singh, spokesman for Dal Khalsa in Punjab also contributed by phone link, called for Nuremburg-type trials to punish Indian officials guilty of war crimes and genocide in Punjab, Kashmir and India's troubled North East. He demanded a UN sponsored plebiscite in the Sikh homeland to allow the Sikhs to demonstrate, freely and fairly, their backing for the Declaration of Khalistan 25 years ago. He pledged to work with "co-travellers on the path of freedom" to promote, by peaceful and democratic means, the implementation of self-determination wherever India's imperialism had sought to crush the birth right of freedom.

Special messages were received from several MPs. **Fabian Hamilton MP**, Chair of the All Party Group for UK Sikhs, opined that "whether it is in the Punjab, in Kashmir or in the Middle East, the rights of peoples in these regions to self-determination should be strongly supported by the international community". **Khaled Mahmood MP** pointed out that, whilst self-determination as a collective human right has been long established by international law, "India, somehow, officially denies it applies to the peoples and nations in the territory controlled by it"; he said that was no way for the Indians to build a case for a permanent UN SC seat. He also called for the human rights violations by India to be addressed: "The rule of law is a pre-requisite to peace and the UN should itself administer justice if the Indian state cannot, or will not, do so". **Marsha Singh MP** asked why the Sikhs, as nation, should not be allowed self-determination if they desired freedom and justice in their homeland. He described Kashmir as a time-bomb and said "we need to defuse this time bomb and that self-determination, by peaceful means, is the only viable option". If 1947 was India's "tryst with destiny" then it now needs a "tryst with justice" and the international community should bring that about.

Ranjit Singh, of the Council of Khalistan, hailed the historic decision of the Sikh nation in 1986 when its leadership declared the establishment of Khalistan, in the face of an onslaught by the full might of the Indian army; some 200,000 Sikhs have been killed since the genocide began in 1984 with no resolution to the conflict in sight. In the words of Human Rights Watch's report entitled 'The Legacy of Abuses in Punjab', "the deliberate use of torture and execution as counterinsurgency tactics was not merely tolerated but actively encouraged by senior government officials". India has repeated the pattern in Kashmir. It should now be put in the dock for genocide by the UN itself, after making obvious its policy of granting immunity to the perpetrators of massive state terrorism.

Professor Nazir Shawl of the Kashmir Centre in London recalled how he had been in India in November 1994 when Sikhs were being butchered in their thousands by Government sponsored mobs. The killing machine has since extended its operations to Kashmir and yet the world stands by ; he asked why the aspirations of the people of the Middle East are more important than the aspirations of the Sikhs, Kashmiris and others like the Nagas? Calling for a more principled approach by the international community, he identified the cessation of violent suppression and the holding of UN supervised plebiscites as the only way to restore enduring peace to these shattered regions. The UN SC's own resolutions on Kashmir were being flouted by a member of that body, which was untenable and repugnant to any right minded person.

Peter Davis of the Naga Support Group in the UK delivered a message from the Foreign Minister of the Government of Nagalim, which has been in negotiation with the Indian government for some 14 years to resolve the Naga struggle for self-determination. The message extended support to the other nations represented within PNSD and lamented that despite 70 rounds of talks "India is yet to demonstrate its real sincerity and preparedness" for a honourable and mutually acceptable solution".

Manmohan Singh of Dal Khalsa spoke of the need to end India's murderous treatment of nations and minorities under its control. Muslims (Gujarat in 2002), Christians (Orissa in 2009) and Sikhs (Delhi in 1984) had been subjected to mass violence by mobs unleashed by the state, with thousands being mercilessly killed whilst security forces looked on. In 2010, the US Congressional Committee on Religious Freedoms put India on its watch list of states that permit religious violence and grant immunity to the guilty. He said the Sikhs will pursue their struggle for freedom and were today , more than ever before, inspired by their leaders who bravely declared independence in 1986.

Ms Rana Nazir of the Kashmir Women's Forum attacked India's appalling record of extra judicial killings, disappearances, torture and illegal detention which she said was shocking on any analysis. She urged all the nations being targeted by these wanton abuses to work together in solidarity and expose the inhumanity of a failed state. **Gurjeet Singh** of the Sikh Federation, UK affirmed that the Sikh nation's historic decision in 1986 to establish Khalistan was irreversible, despite the Indian government's use of unbridled force in trying to reverse it. He called for the well documented systematic abuses by Indian security forces to be acted on by the UN, specifically for it to establish an ad hoc criminal tribunal to give exemplary punishment to those responsible for the carnage of Sikhs since 1984.

Khawaja Sulehman of the Kashmir Information Centre saw India's forcible denial of the right of self-determination as an unforgivable policy which was, in any event, doomed to fail. The USSR and Yugoslavia were not able to stifle the nations trapped within their artificial borders and neither will India in the long run. It was time for India to reformulate its approach, accept the just demands of the people it oppresses and implement what international law demands.

Santokh Singh Saran of the Akali Dal (Amritsar) ridiculed India's so-called secular fabric by highlighting the murderous oppression of religious minorities and the attempt to re-write history by state educational programmes which defame them. He singled out the absurd Article 25 of the Indian Constitution which declares – in the very provision that is supposed to protect freedom of religion – "the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion". The Sikhs are a religion and a nation, but India refuses to recognise them as anything other than an appendage of Hinduism. This would never be tolerated by any Sikh and independence is the only plausible way forward for the Sikhs if they want to secure their homeland, freedom and dignity.

Irshad Malik called for a strategy to isolate India at the UN, as its record and policies are inconsistent with the declared principles of the world body. **Muhammad Ghalib**, President of Tehreek-e- Kashmir, welcomed the

sincere display of solidarity at the Conference between nations who were seeking nothing other than their lawful rights being denied by a common aggressor. **Amrik Singh Sahota, OBE** (President, Council of Khalistan) urged Sikhs, Kashmiris and Nagas to redouble their efforts to secure freedom as this was a prize that would not be handed to them by such a committed foe which has ruthlessly dismissed universally cherished humanitarian values.

Resolutions passed on the occasion called for India to withdraw its 'Reservation' against Article 1 of the 1966 Covenants, or in default, to be subjected to UN sanctions. Linked with this was a call for UN supervised plebiscites in Punjab, Kashmir and Nagalim. In addition, the UN was called on to set up criminal tribunals to investigate and punish those guilty of massive abuses by the state, including genocide. **John Hemming MP** endorsed all three Resolutions, reaffirming his support for the event.

RESOLUTIONS PASSED

AT 'PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION' CONFERENCE

HELD AT THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, 12 MAY 2011

“All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

Article 1, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966

1. This Conference calls on the United Nations to require India to comply with its basic duty under international law to respect the right of self-determination and to withdraw its formal Reservation to Article 1 of the 1966 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. India's position on this core human right is a direct cause of the tragic conflicts in Kashmir, Khalistan, Nagalim Assam, Manipur and elsewhere. The UN's own credibility stands challenged by India's refusal to accept this right and UN sanctions are essential if India refuses. There should be no question of any permanent seat on the UN Security Council for a state which blatantly breaches such a founding principle of the UN Charter.
2. This gathering calls on the UN to supervise plebiscites in the national homelands of the Kashmiris, Sikhs, Nagas and others to demonstrate the authentic voice and aspirations of the people in those regions. Self-determination remains the only peaceful means of conflict resolution after decades of human misery. The recent plebiscite in South Sudan offers a clear example of this approach and we congratulate the people of South Sudan on their anticipated independence.

3. This Conference urges the UN to establish criminal tribunals to prosecute and punish those that have directed and carried out the genocide perpetrated by the Indian state in these conflicts. Even though respected human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented these abuses and described them as state policy aimed at crushing freedom movements, India has refused to even acknowledge those atrocities. The rule of law is a pre-requisite to peace and it is now the UN's responsibility to see that this serial violator of human rights is punished.