

## Statement on Peace and Human Rights in South Asia

Civil society organisations from across South Asia, are deeply concerned about the recent tensions between Pakistan and India. We call up on the Governments of the two countries to take immediate steps to further de-escalate the tension, to create an enabling environment for peace dialogue, and to protect human rights in Kashmir.

The recent serious escalation of the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan is another stark reminder of the urgent need to return the dialogue table and restart the peace process, particularly when it comes to Kashmir. The confrontation last week was triggered by a suicide attack in Pulwama, which killed 40 Indian soldiers. In the wake of this incident there allegedly was an increase of arbitrary detentions in Jammu and Kashmir, resulting in further alienation, mistrust and the violation of human rights.

While we strongly and unreservedly condemn the suicide attack, the response from the Indian authorities does not contribute to finding a sustainable solution for the conflict in Kashmir. Issues of mistrust, political struggle and self-determination need to be addressed through political dialogue and not through suppression and military might.

We urge the Governments of India and Pakistan to take concrete steps to re-initiate dialogue, and to ensure human rights, peace, development and democracy are established in Kashmir. We also call on the two Governments to undertake serious measures to take control of non-state actors involved in extremism and violent attacks in Kashmir and across the countries. Additionally, we encourage both Governments to initiate a process to de-militarise Kashmir, currently the most militarised zone in the world.

To further ensure a region favourable and supportive of a peace process between Pakistan and India, we implore both Governments, with the support of others in the region to revitalise and restore the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and work towards the establishment of a South Asian Human Rights Charter and mechanism to ensure human rights, democracy and sustainable development across South Asia.

As of immediately, we strongly urge both India and Pakistan to refrain from any further hostilities. We are encouraged by initial steps that have been taken to de-escalate the situation, and hope that these can be further translated into measures to find long term solutions that respect human rights and international law.

### Endorsed by:

- Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
- Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), India
- Association of Women for Awareness & Motivation (AWAM), Pakistan
- Awaz Foundation Pakistan – Centre for Development Services, Pakistan
- Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), India

- Bytes for All, Pakistan
- Centre for the Sustainable Use of Natural and Social Resources (CSNR), India
- Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC), Nepal
- Dalit Foundation, India
- Human Rights Alert, India
- Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Pakistan
- Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), Nepal
- INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Sri Lanka
- Law and Society Trust (LST), Sri Lanka
- Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), the Maldives
- National Commission for Justice and Peace, Pakistan
- Odhikar, Bangladesh
- People's Vigilance Committee on Human Rights (PVCHR), India
- People's Watch, India
- Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Nepal

**About FORUM-ASIA:**

*FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 67 member organisations in 21 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.*

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