

The Cause Of Peace In Kashmir Lives On

We gather here today with a common concern, pain, and hope for the victims of the Kashmir catastrophe—regardless of their religious affiliations.

The massacre of eight thousand people has wrecked a havoc in the Kashmiri life and psyche, which will not be healed in decades to come. As if this devastation was not enough, three hundred thousand people were forced to flee from their homes to find refuge outside the Valley. Many of their abandoned homes were later burned down by the militants' supporters. Most of the refugees are living in camps, in subhuman conditions, on \$30 a month government provided dole per former earning family member, in high temperatures they are unused to, without occupation, and without hope of return to decent life and dignity. The plight of their older family members, the education of their young ones, the advancing age of their unmarried daughters—these are the worries that consume their energies and have wiped off smiles from their faces.

The Kashmir crisis has reached a point where it is possible that we may lose it in not so distant future. This calamity will bring unspeakable pain to the Kashmiris worldwide, dismember India of an ancient and a significant part, trigger the withering away of a finely tapestried culture, and turn the decades old echo of historical tranquility in the region into a wider war and chaos.

This evening we will share our sorrow over the tragedy that has engulfed our people and land. We will also fortify our resolve to defeat the well orchestrated terrorist campaign masterminded by our arch enemy Pakistan—which has hungered to enclave Kashmir for long to help its internal political problems. This evening we will also reenergize our hopes that civilized world will prevail over religious fanatics and inhuman politicians.

Sensitive and thoughtful Kashmiris world over want the present upheaval in their homeland to end to let the Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and others return to the land of their birth, to their homes, and live in harmony and peace with each other, like they did for decades—which blends with the natural beauty and tranquility of the place. The turmoil in Kashmir is foreign to its personality.

The distinguished guests amidst us, Hon. H.M. Ansari and Consul General Wakankar, have to help us realize our goals. They have to be our links with the Central Govt. in New Delhi. They have to keep us informed about the

developments in Kashmir. They have to convey our concern for the refugees to the Center. We want the Center to know that it has fallen very short in helping the refugees of the war. Kashmiris have served their nation well but at this hour of their need they want their nation to help them. Govt. and the Kashmiri community here should combine resources and experience for the furtherance of the Kashmir cause.

Today's function has been organized under the sponsorship of Kashmir Solidarity U.S.A., which under the leadership of Mr. Surinder Zutshi has endeavored to bring the attention of American media, people, and political leadership to the Kashmir tragedy. Last year, the organization held a seminar on the Kashmir problem in N.Y. City with Congressman Robert Torricelli as the main speaker, who affirmed the irrevocability of Kashmir's alliance with India. Three of its members visited the refugee camps to assess the situation first-hand and later met some officials in the U.S. State Dept. to amplify their awareness of the problems. Furthermore, it organized a rally at Capitol, in Washington D.C. to draw attention of the lawmakers and media to the suffering of the refugees.

But Kashmir Solidarity U.S.A. is only one of the several organizations devoted to the Kashmir cause. Notably two of them, Kashmir Overseas Association and Indo American Kashmir Forum have also done excellent work in this area. Plurality of organizations is not a problem. It is just a manifestation of regional alliances differing styles and slogans, and leadership personality variations. Their cause is the same and their goals are the same. If the situation were to demand a confluence of these organizations, we are confident that they will shed their skins off and march together to the same tune. There are also individual contributors to the cause many of whom prefer to remain anonymous, without desire for recognition and deliberately keeping out of spotlight.

The enemies of Kashmir have held the ground for a long time but now they are running out of tricks and time. They have aroused the wrath of a patient people and they have challenged our will. If Kashmir dies can we live, and if we live can we let Kashmir die.