



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2005/NGO/134
3 March 2005

ENGLISH ONLY

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixty-first session
Item 7 of the provisional agenda

THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

**Written statement* submitted by Interfaith International,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 January 2005]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The emerging peace between India and Pakistan represents a major achievement for the people of the sub-continent who have seen considerable turbulence in their region in the last half a century. It also presents a promise for human development among the disadvantaged and disfranchised citizens of the region which has remained mostly unfulfilled until now.

There is a general agreement among South Asia security experts that steps taken by India and Pakistan in the last year represent a major de-escalation from the nightmare of nuclear confrontation that seemed possible a few years back. The Kashmir issue, which was repeatedly being referred to as the “nuclear flashpoint” between the two warring nations armed with nuclear weapons, is no longer considered to be an “incendiary issue”, though it is by no means resolved.

There are many reasons why a “mid-course correction” was necessary in India-Pakistan relations. While India has always sought a “composite dialogue” with Pakistan that would address the Kashmir issue within contours of the Simla Agreement, Pakistan has sought to treat Kashmir as the “core issue”, insisting that the issue be taken up before any other issues are discussed by the two countries. Planning huge military expenditures and justifying a dominant role for military in Pakistan’s political and institutional establishments, Pakistan has consistently kept the Kashmir issue in the limelight using a variety of diplomatic, military and covert methods to force India into a quick agreement on Kashmir.

Unfortunately for Pakistan, the results have been quite contrary to their desires. Whereas large military expenditures in the early stages of Pakistani international campaign did invigorate Pakistani economy over the socialist economic structure within India, the liberalization of Indian economy in the last decade has provided an unprecedented economic growth that has leapfrogged Pakistan’s sluggish economy mired by uneven allocation of resources, internal strife and severe public corruption. Today, Pakistan’s purchasing power parity is barely 11% of India’s, and contrary to the hopes that a “proxy war” in Kashmir would lead to economic ruin of India; it is Pakistan that has nearly brushed with economic collapse. Pakistani strategists have sought time from their military leaders to allow Pakistan to build its economy before engaging into another major confrontation with India, if necessary.

Mr. Chairman, India and Pakistan have turned a “strategic standstill” into an opportunity for everlasting peace. I believe the momentum for this change was provided by the people of two countries who wish to live in peace and consider no issue between the two countries – including Kashmir – to be worth the hatred, misery and wars that have prevailed in the past.

Indeed, in the last year India and Pakistan have pursued a number of confidence building measures (CBMs), which taken together, represent a new level of cooperation between the two countries. New people-to-people contacts like the India-Pakistan Soldier's Initiative for Peace (IPSIP) or India Pakistan Doctors for Peace and Development (IPDPD), and recent exchange visits of journalists have created a new hope for peace and normalcy in the region.

Some of the CBM's have already been announced and implemented, while many others are actively under consideration. Hotlines have been established between the Director-Generals of Military Operations (DGMO) and the Foreign Secretaries, a protocol has been established to provide advance notification about missile test firings, and there is an "informal" nuclear test moratorium in place. In addition, the two countries have agreed to cooperate and meet regularly on issues dealing with narcotics control, coast guard, visits to religious shrines, relaxed visa regime, interactions between border guards and an extradition treaty.

Some CBM related issues are under intense negotiations and could greatly simplify life of ordinary citizens as well as soldiers. These include withdrawal from the Siachen Glacier, opening of the road link between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar , rail link between Munnabao and Khokrapar (Sind region), detention of fishermen and visa-on-arrival scheme.

But for the peace to become permanent and not be subject to whims of military dictators, it is imperative that the two countries embrace a policy of increased economic cooperation and inter-dependency. This is possible in the context of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and especially under the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

The current trade between India and Pakistan amounts to under \$500 million annually. It has the potential to reach up to 3 or 4 times that figure by implementing a friendly bilateral trade regime between India and Pakistan. An example would be the Free Trade Agreement between India and Sri Lanka. In spite of repeated efforts by India to secure a most favored nation (MFN) status from Pakistan, the later has steadfastly refused to do so. On the other hand, Pakistan has sought Indian involvement in a gas pipeline from Iran which will bring natural gas to energy deficient India while providing transit income to Pakistan. India has tentatively agreed to such an arrangement, provided Pakistan grants it the MFN status and allows India to set up transit facilities to promote business with Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbors. In addition, agricultural products, industrial machinery and tourism could be targeted for growth if the two nations would agree on a free trade agreement.

Once the economic and commercial cooperation is set on a firm basis, the two countries can look at more contentious issues. The resolution of the Kashmir issue will require a high level of trust and objectivity between the two parties that are mostly missing for now, but could

evolve as the economic relationship improves. But a bigger problem looming in the subcontinent is the lack of human development among the bottom 20% (or more) of the population, with disparities between the have and have-nots multiplying at a frightening pace these days. Additionally, the numbers of internally displaced people (IDP) have grown exponentially, affected by civil strife in numerous pockets of country facing insurgency and terrorism.

A common challenge for the rich and the poor to co-exist in such a space is to preserve ecological balance for sustained development. An author, Jared Diamond, has written a new book called, "Collapse: How Societies Chose to Fail or Succeed", in which he provides historical rationale to describe how once mighty societies were brought to a ruin by ecological disasters like deforestation. Today, India and Pakistan are both fast approaching ecological doomsday unless steps are taken (jointly) to ward off such disasters through planning, education, conservation of natural resources, and creation of joint collaborative programs dealing with planting trees, conservation of soil and water resources, etc.

Finally, we believe that changing the attitude of bureaucracies in India and Pakistan is key to improving the relationship between the two countries. Accordingly, exchange programs should be initiated in both countries to allow young bureaucrats to undertake study tours of the neighboring country and for press personnel to meet frequently with bureaucrats from the neighboring country. Similar programs must be encouraged for students to study in educational institutions of the other country to allow new perspectives to bloom in young minds. India and Pakistan should also be encouraged to jointly co-sponsor United Nations Conferences dealing with human development, ecological regeneration and elimination of terrorism in the subcontinent.

Mr. Chairman, there exists a "trust deficit" between India and Pakistan that must be eliminated first in order for the two countries to tackle more controversial issues that have loomed large in their dealings with each other. This trust must be built through improved lives and reduced poverty in these two nations, as well as in other neighboring countries. While there is no "magic wand", it is very likely that the quality of life will change for the better with increased trade and cooperation. That would require determined efforts of India and Pakistan to make SAFTA a success, leading to improved infrastructure, a common market and eventually to free movement of people. When people can travel at will, the fences and boundaries will lose their significance. What wars and militancy could not achieve in Kashmir will become reality through peaceful coexistence and growing commerce.
