



# Indo-American Kashmir Forum

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## OPENING REMARKS

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Indo American Kashmir Forum

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It is my pleasure to welcome you here. This is our first attempt to do this sort of event, and I am sure that we will learn a lot from this experience, as much as we hope that you will about the subject that I am about to introduce. I am very grateful to Congressman Bill McCollum and Congressman Rob Andrews for hosting the breakfast today.

Our organization, the Indo-American Kashmir Forum, to distinguish it from our adversary organization, is an all volunteer organization. Every one in the group is gainfully employed in various professions, and there are no full time or paid staff members in the organization. It is strictly a labor of love, as much as it is for our two sister organizations, the London-based Indo European Kashmir Forum and the Ottawa-based Indo Canadian Kashmir Forum. We started the Forum in 1990 after the casualty count in our community in Kashmir - Kashmiri Pandits or KPs as we are called - touched each and every KP family that has migrated to the U.S. The prime objective of the organization is to highlight and help bring to an end atrocities committed by terrorists and militants on Kashmiri minorities, especially the Pandits. The only reason why Pandits have suffered is because they are a religious minority in Kashmir. It should be noted that inspite of brutality and humiliation that Pandits have suffered in Kashmir so far, not one - let me repeat NOT ONE - case exists where a Kashmiri Pandit has resorted to any violence in return. Kashmiri Pandits have paid the supreme price for their nonviolent and tolerant behavior. The sad part is that so few people know about it or indeed are informed about what is truly happening in Kashmir or to Pandits today. It is, by and large, an untold story.

Today's briefing is about terrorism and the manner it is being increasingly used as a political instrument, especially by the Islamic fundamentalists. Charles Krauthammer calls it a "global intifada", and the Islamists themselves call it a war on "Dar el-Harb". Whatever causes the spark soon leads to a fire that consumes people in ways thought impossible or medieval at the best. At the worst it releases the demons, and the dark side of human nature comes to the fore. The world as usual gives more time and attention to the welfare of those who commit the crimes, rather than the victims. Unfortunately, in this case the world might have prevented the tragedy to our people. I guess we were not as lucky as the Kurds, because obviously we do not fit into any global geopolitical strategy.

What has happened to the KPs can happen to minorities elsewhere in the world, if world leaders and media continue to maintain a superficial interest in such events. Increasingly, responsible journalists are unable to distinguish between organized movements seeking to overthrow colonial rule from other well managed movements using the cover of freedom struggle to impose a certain

religious order at odds with native social and cultural practices. In Kashmir, Islamic fundamentalists masquerading as freedom fighters are destroying the fabric of Kashmiri identity called "Kashmiriat" by attacking the very symbols and practices that Kashmiris of all faiths respect. For Islamists, the secular character of Kashmiri people, as indeed of the rest of India, is unacceptable. With support and arms from neighboring countries, especially Pakistan, the terrorists have turned our paradise into hell. They wanted "Nizam-e-Mustafa" but got "Nizam-e-Qahar".

Today, I am sad to report that the Islamists have by and large succeeded in their objective to drive Kashmiri Pandits from the valley. They started by systematically killing the intellectual elite among our community. Then a reign of terror was let loose when women were violated in front of their children and families were forced to eat grain soaked with the blood of their elders. There are cases where victims were subjected to slow deaths, and even cases where people were hacked to pieces on logging saws before being dumped into rivers. When the survivors fled, their homes were looted and torched. Many of their temples were destroyed. Even more tragic than these gruesome crimes is the sad fact that the Kashmiri Pandit culture, a culture that has thrived uninterruptedly from the times when Pharaohs ruled Egypt, is fast sinking into oblivion. The valley has been ethnically cleansed of the Kashmiri Pandits and those uprooted have led a miserable life in refugee camps for the last five years, and are now slowly beginning to disappear and disperse in the vast Indian subcontinent.

Let me leave you with the following thoughts. If people as diverse as Charles Krauthammer and Mary McGrory can agree on what has happened to Kashmiri Pandits, if Congressmen McCollum and Andrews can stand on the same platform and talk about the Pandits and about other victims of global intifada, then surely we are making a humble beginning. Perhaps, there is some hope and all is not lost yet. Perhaps the lessons from this painful experience can be translated to this country so that American citizens do not have to suffer like the Kashmiri Pandits. Let us hope that incidents in New York and Oklahoma City are not repeated. We do not wish on you what has happened to Kashmiri Pandits. Terrorism is evil. We have to stop it in all its forms and shapes, and wherever it happens. That, in my opinion, is the greatest challenge the civilized society faces in the new world order. Thank you.