

United States Department of State

*Assistant Secretary of State for
South and Central Asian Affairs*

Washington, D.C. 20520-6258

October 27, 2010

Dear Senator Brown:

I appreciate your concerns about Kashmiri Pandits expressed in your October 13 letter. We are aware of the hardships faced by Hindus, particularly from the Pandit community, who have fled the Kashmir Valley due to persecution. We share your goal of seeing them return to their homes as soon as possible.

The Kashmir issue is complex and longstanding. In response to unrest this past summer, the Manmohan Singh government appointed a three-member panel to meet all stakeholders in the Kashmir region and make recommendations to ease the situation. The panel's first visit to Srinagar ended today, and the public statements by its members convey an encouraging message that the panel has high-level backing and an open mandate. We encourage India and Pakistan to settle this dispute peacefully, and the pace, scope, and character of any dialogue on Kashmir is for the governments of Pakistan and India to determine.

We will continue to monitor the situation of the Kashmiri Pandits. The State Department and our Embassy in New Delhi will maintain contact with representatives from the Pandit community. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require further assistance.

Sincerely,



Robert O. Blake, Jr.

The Honorable
Sherrod Brown,
United States Senate.

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 13, 2010

The Honorable Robert Blake
Assistant Secretary – South and Central Asian Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Blake:

As President Obama's state visit to India approaches, I encourage you to make the Kashmiri Pandits in and from the Valley a part of the discussions. As Pakistan and India attempt to resolve the Kashmir dispute, there is a tendency to ignore Pandits in such a dialogue, and lacking critical mass, Pandits have been denied due recognition by both countries

Most Kashmiri Pandits have been forced to flee to other parts of India despite having inhabited Kashmir Valley for more than 5,000 years. Only a few thousand Pandits remain in the Kashmir valley today, due to the region's violence and religious and ethnic persecution. However, many wish to return to their native lands in the Valley, and it is imperative that this withering minority be included in any regional dialogues concerning the future of the Jammu and Kashmir. The local government in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is partly responsible for keeping the minority community away, and the situation has led to slow erosion of plurality and steady rise in radicalism in the Valley that has currently manifested in renewed violence in that region.

Pandit participation in ongoing peace talks will help ensure that they remain an integral part of the Kashmir valley's future and its prospects for peace. Any agreement reached between India and Pakistan must ensure the preservation of Pandit culture and identity in the Valley while empowering and encouraging those living in refugee camps to return to their native land.

The United States has long been a champion of the promotion of human rights around the world. Including the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits as part of the President's state visit will continue this tradition as well as improve our standing as an arbiter of peace and a close ally of India.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator