

UNIVERSAL RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Reference to be provided by Prof. Khurshid

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United Nations World Conference on Human Rights is beginning in Vienna from Monday, 14th June, 1993. A three-day Non-Governmental Organizations Conference, as a prelude to the major event, has begun today. Some 160 states and several thousand NGOs are attending this conference. This is the second largest meeting of its kind since the Human Rights Summit held in Tehran in 1968. Pakistan delegation is being led by the PPP Chairperson as part of the Muslim League (Nawaz Group) - PPP rapprochement whatever be the merits or otherwise of this policy what is important is clarity and firmness about policy position on human rights. I ask the Government to clearly formulate and announce Pakistan's position on some of the critical issues in relation to human rights that must be raised and lobbied in this conference.

From Pakistan's viewpoint the first major issue is India's wanton violation of human rights in Kashmir and its denial to the people of Jammu and Kashmir their right to self-determination. Representatives from occupied Kashmir must be sent to this conference to give eye-witness account of Indian atrocities in occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Similarly communal violence against the Muslims in India, racial cleansing in Bosnia and the Balkans, violation of human rights and denial of right of self-determination to the Muslim/Arab people of Palestine, persecution of Muslims in Burma deserve to be specially highlighted in this conference. As far as the conceptual aspects of Human Rights are concerned, four issues deserve to be firmly projected on this occasion:

First, the question of human rights is basically a question that relates to ALL human beings and we as Muslims are equally committed to their fullest protection and promotion. As such the issue is NOT primarily of Western concern. What is important is universal respect for these rights and a non-discriminatory approach to the problem. The attitude of the Western countries, particularly of America and its European allies is selective and highly discriminatory. They are trying to use the stick of human rights to settle political scores and censure whom they treat as 'baddies', while conniving at the human rights record of the so-called 'goodies'. State terror against innocent people and political adversaries is condoned if it takes place in countries that are serving Western interests and only censured if the venue relates to countries treated as unfriendly or even 'friends' who are prepared to show some political independence. This duplicity is as great a crime as violation of human rights.

After the end of the Cold War, during which Human Rights issue played an important role in ostracizing Communism and Communist regimes, the same tactics are being used against some Third World and Muslim countries. This political use of Human Rights is bound to degrade a noble effort to protect humanity from arbitrary use of power.

Secondly, while there is proper realization of individual human rights, there is no proper realization of group rights, particularly of religious and cultural minorities. The question of the right of self-determination of people still under occupation has also been thrown into backyard for some time. NAM which has been pioneering this right for decades and which affirmed the right of a people to seek liberation from arbitrary rule is now backtracking on the right of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, Palestine, Mindanao, Arakan and others. It is time to re-emphasize the importance of group and community rights and bring them to the fore of the discussion.

Thirdly, the question of religious and cultural rights of the individual as well as the community deserves to be given as central a position as is given to personal and political rights. A more balanced and integrated approach is needed than the one that has been pursued so far.

Finally, the question of the economic rights of the Third World nations, an area grossly neglected by the developed countries of the West, deserves to be emphasized by all the Muslim and Third World countries. Developed countries have even used the cloak of civil and political rights as a smoke-screen to hide their criminal violation of the economic rights of the developing and other Third World countries. The dismal record of the industrial world in respect of closing its markets to Third World products, manipulating prices of primary products, restrictions on transfer of technology, monetary destabilization of Third World countries through exchange rate policies, flooding of the world with unprotected dollars, and the entire policy of perpetuating debt-burden represent violation⁴ of economic rights of the Third World countries. The UN conference on Human Rights must demand an equitable policy in respect of ALL Human Rights, of individuals, communities and nations, and not merely a selective policy that serves the interests of the powerful few.

Pakistan must take up all these issues in the UN World Conference on Human Rights and mobilize all the Muslim and Third World opinion in respect of these issues. The success of the delegation would be judged on the criteria of its achievements in respect of mobilization of support for these issues.
