



BRIEFING ON COVID CRISIS IN KASHMIR

WHO WE ARE:

StandWithKashmir is a Kashmiri diaspora-driven independent global citizen grassroots group committed to standing in solidarity with the people of Kashmir in ending the occupation and supporting their right to self-determination.

SWK is a registered non-profit with a focus on grassroots engagement with elected officials, policy makers, outreach efforts to the broader community and raising awareness around Kashmir in all levels of society and politics. We speak as concerned citizens and are neither affiliated nor coordinated with any foreign government, organization, or political entity.

CURRENT COVID CRISIS IN KASHMIR:

With India ranking second after the United States at 29.1 million confirmed cases of coronavirus and 353,528 deaths as of 10 June 2021, StandWithKashmir is deeply concerned about the rise in Covid-19 cases in Kashmir as a result of Indian state negligence and discrimination.

Decades of conflict and occupation have stunted the healthcare infrastructure in Jammu & Kashmir. There are an estimated 600 ventilators for a population of over 13 million and one doctor for every 3866 people. Just to note, the World Health Organization standard is one doctor for every 1000 people. With its already limited staff and services, Kashmir's fragile healthcare system has been pushed to the brink. Even in the midst of a pandemic, the Indian government continues to seize and restrict public access to life-saving resources through discriminatory government orders and inequitable distribution of medical aid.

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We urge you to demand that the Indian government immediately:

1.REVOKE ALL DISCRIMINATORY GOVERNMENT ORDERS:

On May 6th, the Indian state ordered oxygen manufacturers in Kashmir to supply only 'designated hospitals', thereby cutting out private hospitals and local non-profits that have in the wake of the government's negligence played an instrumental role in providing life-saving oxygen to Kashmiris recovering from COVID-19 at home.

With only two oxygen manufacturing units in Kashmir, it's critical that these units remain accessible to all hospitals and NGOs.

2.IMMEDIATELY ADDRESS THE UNEVEN AID DISTRIBUTION IN KASHMIR:

Although 62% of total cases within Jammu & Kashmir were reported in the Valley of Kashmir, the Indian Government's distribution of vaccines has been extremely skewed. Jammu received approximately 1.5 M vaccines whereas Muslim-majority Kashmir, a region with roughly three times the population of Jammu, received around 1.4 M vaccines.

Kashmir's hospitals have reported a deficit of vaccines leaving patients waiting for days for their second dose. Furthermore, a large percentage of the doses sent to Kashmir was directed to Indian paramilitary forces while a small fraction was made available to the public.

3.CANCEL ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE AND STOP ALL INCOMING TRAFFIC INTO THE REGION:

Despite the mass deaths in India, the Indian government has yet to cancel the Amarnath Pilgrimage. It plans to ferry over 600,000 people from all over India into the state using over 30,000 administrative and military personnel.

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Even today, the regime allows air and road traffic from India to Jammu & Kashmir without adequate testing and quarantine measures. If the course does not change, we are certainly facing an uncontrollable, apocalyptic spread of COVID-19 that would devastate an already traumatized region.

4.RELEASE ALL KASHMIRI DETAINEES AND PRISONERS:

Thousands of Kashmiris continue to languish in prisons across the region and India. Most have been arrested without charge and without prospect of trial under draconian laws like the 'Public Safety Act' (PSA) and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). They are effectively facing a death sentence in overcrowded, unhygienic, and poorly ventilated prisons.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Call on the Indian government to:

- Revoke the order restricting access to local oxygen manufacturing units;
- Given all the incoming international aid, ensure medications and vaccines are available in Jammu & Kashmir in an equitable manner;
- Cancel the annual Amarnath Pilgrimage in Kashmir and immediately suspend all air traffic from India into the region including that of military personnel;
- Release all incarcerated Kashmiris, including political prisoners, children and ailing individuals, who have been taken far away from their homes in Kashmir and India;
- Procure, provide and establish oxygen generation facilities required for meeting ICU and non-ICU needs of hospitals in public and private sectors to handle the impending COVID-19 pandemic surge;
- Ensure mandatory PCR testing protocols and quarantine of travelers by road till on-spot results are available.
- Allow free flow of information with regards to the pandemic in mainstream and social media without resorting to censorship or intimidation of journalists or citizens. The Modi government is infamous for suppressing dissent. Lack of transparency could result in hundreds of thousands of deaths in Kashmir.

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RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Ways to act:

- **Issue a public statement** expressing deep concern on behalf of Kashmiri constituents who have been directly impacted by the crisis in Kashmir.
- **Communicate concerns** to the Indian government as well as local government officials.

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