PUCL Condemns indiscriminate killing of civilians in Kashmir Valley

PUCL strongly condemns the indiscriminate and unabated killing of civilians by militants in the Kashmir Valley. This year over 31 civilian, non-combatants have been killed which include 11 civilians killed in October alone. Out of the 11 civilians killed, seven belong to the minority communities (Hindus and Sikhs). Very clearly these killings are meant to create a fear psychosis and sense of terror amongst the minority communities in Kashmir so that they leave the Valley.

The tally includes:
1. On 05th October, 2021, Mr. ML Bindroo, a well-known and respected Kashmiri Pandit who ran a chain of pharmacies in Srinagar was shot dead while sitting in his shop. On the same day, Virender Paswan, a street food vendor from Bhagalpur District of Bihar was shot dead in another locality; militants also shot dead Mohammad Shafi, President of a Taxi Stand in Bandipora.
2. On 07th October, 2021, 4 militants walked into the Boys Higher Secondary School in Sangam Eidgah locality of Srinagar and shot dead the Principal, Ms. Supinder Kour, belonging to the Sikh faith, and Mr. Deepak Chand, a Hindu teacher in the same school.
3. The spate of killings of civilians continued with targetted killing of non-local migrant workers. On 16th October, 2021, a street vendor from Bihar and a carpenter from UP were shot dead in two different places. Following this, on 17.10.2021 at Wanpoh area of Kulgam district three migrant workers were shot at leaving behind 2 persons killed and one seriously injured.
4. It is also reported that a number of Kashmiri Muslim civilians have also been shot dead in the several incidents of targetted killings. In all, as on date a total of 11 civilian, including 7 Hindus and Sikhs and 4 Muslims non-combatants have been reportedly killed by militant groups in different places in the Kashmir Valley in October, 2021.

PUCL expresses its deepest condolences to the families of those who have lost their family members due to the targetted shootings. We also wish to reassure them that people across India stand with them during this difficult and challenging period. It is reassuring to know from media reports that many leaders, parties and groups of Kashmiri Muslim majority members have not only condemned the killings but also spontaneously reached
out, expressing their anguish and support to the families whose loved ones have been shot dead. This has helped assuage the sense of fear sought to be instilled through the killings. It is also encouraging that some mosques in Srinagar, during Friday prayers, have also given a call to the local people to stand in support with the minority community residents thereby reasserting the bonds of communal harmony and togetherness, which is the hallmark of Kashmiriyat. Added to this silver lining is the declaration of the Mayor of Srinagar that the road on which Bindroo’s shop is situated will be named as ‘Shaheed Makhan Lal Bindroo Road’.

The targeted killings of civilians are inhuman and constitute a serious violation of human rights and crimes against humanity. The continuous spree of killings exposes the lie of both the Kashmir UT Administration and the Central Government that in the last 2 years since the abrogation of Art. 370, they have restored calm and normalcy in the Valley. It is important at this juncture to point out that the recent killing of minorities and non-locals is occurring in the backdrop of continuing security crackdown and widespread arbitrary arrests of thousands of locals by security forces amidst persistent complaints of widespread torture and human rights violations. In such a situation, it is especially important that the Administration and the Security Forces handle the situation with extra care and sensitivity and do nothing that will further estrange and alienate the Kashmiri people, both the majority Muslims as also the minority Hindus-Sikhs and other non-locals.

We reiterate our earlier demand that the Government must listen to the people of Kashmir, permit free speech, stop shackling the media and allow democratic political process. Of great concern are recent moves to summarily and arbitrarily dismiss from government service, Kashmiris on specious ground of being related to militants; this apart, tinkering with land laws, ousting people from properties and opening local economy to external corporate interests, are all creating widespread anger and disquiet in the Valley.

It is time that civil society in India steps out and stand up in support of democratic voices and democratic groups in the Kashmir Valley and to fight against further alienation of different sections of Kashmir society. We also call upon the Indian Government and Administration of the UT of Kashmir to give up the policy of finding military solutions for what is at its core, a political problem requiring a political solution.

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