

Report: Launching of Policy Brief on “Institutionalizing CBMs on Kashmir” organized by Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) Islamabad in collaboration with the Kashmir Initiative Group (KIG) on January 29, 2014.

## **Kashmir-specific CBMs need to be institutionalized**

**Aarish U. Khan**

ISLAMABAD: Future of Kashmir-specific Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) depends on their institutionalization, says a recent study “Institutionalizing Confidence Building Measures on Kashmir” co-authored by Shaheen Akhtar, a scholar of the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), and Zafar Choudhry, a scholar from the Indian-held Kashmir.

Speaking at the launching ceremony of the study organized by IRS in collaboration with the Kashmir Initiative Group (KIG) here on Wednesday, Dr. Akhtar maintained that since the CBMs are a means to the end of helping the people of Kashmir and promoting peace in the region, they need to be predictable and consistent, as well as accountable. She underscored the importance of a common shared understanding of the CBMs among all the three parties to the conflict, i.e., the Pakistani, the Indians, and the Kashmiris. She argued that the value of CBMs is judged by their capacity to create constituencies for peace, and added that the trade and travel CBMs in their existing form are inadequate in bringing the people of Kashmir on both sides of the divide together. She was of the view that restricting trade to barter system between the divided families only with no banking and credit facilities was highly insufficient. Dr. Akhtar added that the cross-Line of Control (LoC) interactions are further subjected to the political situations within India and Pakistan as well as the condition of diplomatic relations between them. Dr. Akhtar underscored the importance of demining of the LoC as a CBM as well as increased coordination between the Indian and Pakistani military commanders along the dividing line. She called for the introduction of biometric smart-cards for facilitating intra-Kashmir travel and trade and also for the institutionalization of the intra-Kashmir dialogue.

Zafar Choudhry regarded the intra-Kashmir CBMs to be a very challenging discourse. He maintained that the acceptability of the CBMs itself was a challenge. He argued that all the Kashmiris on both sides of the LoC were discontented with the status quo and wanted it to change. He negated the impression that CBMs like the bus-service between the two parts of the divided Kashmir was perpetuating the status quo, and called CBMs an essential process for changing state behavior. He suggested putting the Kashmiris ahead in the process of CBMs, arguing that the Kashmiris had more room in moving forward on them. “For institutionalizing the existing CBMs, we’ll have to create a constituency for acceptance of the CBMs within Kashmir,” said Mr. Choudhry. He was of the view that the acceptance of the CBMs within Kashmir was dependent upon their role in improving cross-LoC interaction and the lives of ordinary Kashmiris.

Dr. Shafqat Mahmood, member of the parliament from the political party Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), emphasized the need for contextualizing the CBMs in light of the existing situation on the ground. He stated that there is an across-the-board consensus in Pakistan over improvement of relations with India, but that the same cannot be said about India. He opined that since the early resolution of the Kashmir dispute is not yet in sight, there is a need for improving the lives of ordinary Kashmir through Kashmir-specific cross-LoC CBMs. He added that since the Indian occupation of Kashmir is very harsh on the

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Kashmiris, efforts should be made to demilitarize both sides of the divided Kashmir so that Kashmiris in the Indian-held Kashmir can breathe easy.

Former Speaker of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Assembly, Mr. Shah Ghulam Qadir, considered the whole process of CBMs between India and Pakistan on Kashmir foreign-induced with no real political will within India or Pakistan with respect to it. He lamented the blockage of the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar trade link because of a recent untoward incident. He alleged that the Indian government did not want to discuss Kashmir with Pakistan at all, and that the Indian forces are busy in picking up innocent Kashmiris from along the LoC and then killing them by proclaiming them as terrorists. Mr. Qadir agreed with Dr. Mahmood that an across-the-board political will for improving relations with Pakistan did not exist in India.

Another legislator from AJK, Mr. Sardar Khalid Ibrahim, maintained that since Kashmir had become an international issue after the UN resolution of 1949, there could not be a bilateral solution to it. He said that India and Pakistan will not only have to involve the Kashmiris but also the international community in the process. Sardar Amjad Yousaf of the Kashmir Institute of International Relations (KIIR) emphasized the need for analyzing the CBMs in light of their efficacy in improving the lives of the Kashmiris. Former diplomat Ishtiaq Andrabi called for making the CBMs dynamic for continued relevance in the changing circumstances.

The launching ceremony of the report was widely attended by participants from various walks of life with an interest in the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute, including the Acting President of IRS Brig. Bashir Ahmad and scholars of IRS.