

## **No Women Narrative on Kashmir Conflict**

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ISLAMABAD: “There is hardly any women narrative on the Kashmir conflict in India and Pakistan,” said Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Senior Research Analyst at the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), here on Friday. She was the main speaker at a roundtable organized by IRS on “The Role of Women in Peace-building”.

Dr. Akhtar maintained that the women of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), especially the ones from the refugee or divided families, were directly affected by the conflict across the Line of Control (LoC) in the Indian-held Kashmir (IHK). She shared that around 8 percent of the total population of Kashmir is composed of the refugee families. Dr. Akhtar argued that civil society is a vital part of any peace process. According to her, being 49 percent of the civil society of AJK, the women could not be ignored in peace-building efforts.

Dr. Akhtar asserted that there was a strong link between socio-economic, legal, and political status of women and their role in peace-building. Therefore, she suggested capacity-building of women as peacemakers. “The capacity of women in peace-building can be enhanced through their socio-economic and political empowerment,” said Dr. Akhtar. This, she thought, could be brought about through their enhanced representation in the civil service, and economic and political institutions.

Dr. Akhtar called for political education of women parliamentarians to increase their role in gender-sensitive legislation in the AJK Assembly. Besides suggesting to raise awareness about women’s rights under the existing framework, Dr. Akhtar also recommended increasing women’s understanding about the Kashmir conflict and their role in peace-building.

Other participants of the roundtable included: Dr. Ashraf Azim, President IRS; Ms. Farhat Parveen, Senior Research Analyst IRS; as well as other researchers from IRS and other think-tanks.