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Andrew Gwynne MP  
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Rt. Hon. Sir Keir Starmer, QC, MP  
The Leader of the Opposition  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

4<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear Keir

I am writing following your letter of 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 to Mrs Patel following your online meeting with Labour Friends of India.

Whilst I appreciate and understand your desire for the Labour Party to be able to reach out to communities right across the United Kingdom, I am writing on behalf of Labour Friends of Kashmir to highlight some considerable concern amongst the Kashmiri diaspora in Britain regarding the reported statements from the meeting, and in the aforementioned letter, concerning the issue of Kashmir.

Firstly, you stated that Kashmir is solely a bilateral matter between India and Pakistan; however, the territorial dispute is the subject of over a dozen outstanding United Nation Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, which grants Kashmiris the right to self-determination through "*a free and impartial plebiscite*". It is a matter of international law, of which the United Kingdom has a specific interest at seeing the matter properly resolved within the terms of the UNSC resolutions (both as a permanent member of

the UN Security Council, and as the former colonial power which left the status of Kashmir ambiguous upon the granting of independence to India and Pakistan).

There are also some very serious reports of human rights abuses, many of which have been documented by respected international human rights organisations. The Labour Party should always stand up for human right at home and across the globe, and sadly, your letter has been interpreted by some in the Kashmiri community as condoning and legitimising these human rights abuses in Kashmir – which I know is categorically not the case, but this is how it is sadly being seen within the diaspora community here in Britain.

Some of the recent records include:

- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on June 14, 2018 noted that  
*“There remains an urgent need to address past and ongoing human rights violations and to deliver justice for all people in Kashmir who have been suffering from seven decades of conflict. Any resolution to the political situation in Kashmir should entail a commitment to ending the cycles of violence and accountability for past and current human rights violations and abuses committed by all parties and redress for victims”*. OHCHR reiterated its apprehensions and demands in its 2<sup>nd</sup> Report, issued recently in July 2019;
- The OIC also adopted a resolution on Kashmir in Dhaka in May 2018. Fifty-seven countries, through a resolution, called upon India to end human rights violations and grant Kashmiris their right to self-determination. The OIC, in its 5 August 2019 statement, has expressed deep shock at the use of prohibited Cluster Bombs targeting civilians and also at the deployment of additional paramilitary forces;

- Human Rights Watch World Report 2019 notes that, *“The government led by BJP harassed and prosecuted activists, lawyers, human rights defenders and journalists for criticizing authorities. Draconian Sedation Laws were used to chill free expression”*;
  
- And our own All Party Parliamentary Group on Kashmir (APPKG), in its October 2018 inquiry report into the human rights situation, also raised serious questions on morality and legality of the draconian laws, such as Special Powers Act 1990 and Public Safety Act 1978, due to which Indian security forces enjoy immunity for their crimes. It urged Indian government to repeal them and to initiate a comprehensive public investigation into the identities of bodies in unmarked graves, documented in their Report entitled: Buried Evidence, by a Kashmiri NGO called International People’s Tribunal along with the Association of the Parents of Disappeared Persons;
  
- Earlier, in 2008, EU had urged India to investigate presence of hundreds of mass graves in the Uri district;
  
- The US State Department country report on human rights practices for 2018 noted human rights issues in Indian-controlled Kashmir which includes reports of arbitrary killings; forced disappearances; torture; rape in Police custody; arbitrary arrests and detention: and reports of illegal incarceration of political prisoners;
  
- The Amnesty International Report of 2016-17, entitled: Losing Sight in Kashmir, notes that *“Security forces continued to use inherently inaccurate pellet-firing shotguns blinding many hundreds completely and thousands partially”*;

And there is a great deal more evidence-based reporting of human rights abuses which can be forwarded to you.

The Labour Party has always been the voice of the poor and suppressed, and I know it will continue to be so under your Leadership. It has always, too, voiced support for the upholding of international law and has stood firmly for human rights and human dignity. Again, I know it will continue to do so under your Leadership.

And the Labour Party's internationalism expects us to speak up for human rights across the globe. These rights are inviolable and sacrosanct, and, therefore, cannot be an internal matter of any single country, which is why the issue of Kashmir is an issue on which the Labour Party and the next Labour Government – which you will lead – should have a voice on this issue. Not to 'take sides' or to 'divide' communities, but to work towards a peaceful resolution to one of the world's longest-standing injustices and to secure dignity and peace for the Kashmiri people.

I know a meeting is being arranged with Labour MPs and yourself to discuss these matters in more detail. We look forward to working with you so that the Kashmiri community in Britain can see that the British Labour Party will always have their solidarity in the quest for peace and human dignity.

Yours sincerely



**ANDREW GWYNNE MP**

**Chair**

**On behalf of Labour Friends of Kashmir**



**CLLR WAJID KHAN**

**Convener**

**On behalf of Labour Friends of Kashmir**