

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director General of the World Health Organization

Respected Dr. Ghebreyesus,

Subject: Seeking your intervention in restoring full internet access to Indian Administered Kashmir to mitigate risks of Covid-19 pandemic

We the scholars of Kashmir and other academics and health professionals would like to bring to your notice the debilitating communications lockdown that has been in place in Indian-controlled Kashmir for the past seven months. Despite the region reporting multiple positive cases of Covid-19, the Indian government has, criminally, barred residents from accessing reliable, high-speed internet. More than eight million people living in Kashmir [are unable to depend on the internet](#) to get reliable information on the pandemic. Only recently, through an administrative diktat, the Indian authorities extended the ban on high-speed internet until 26th of March. Residents constantly report the unreliability and slowness of low-speed internet (2G) in opening basic web pages, let alone using it for data-heavy purposes like accessing medical and educational resources. As a reminder, the maximum speed of 2G is about 50 Kbps; that of a 4G network, the current global standard, when the device is moving is 100 Mbps and 1 Gbps when the caller is stationary or walking. That means, even in these times of a global pandemic--where timely access to critical information by the doctors and the public might be a key to survival--India is punishing Kashmiris via [an internet 2,000 to 20,000 times slower than the rest of the world](#). The actions of the Indian government constitute denial of critical and humanitarian assistance and as such are criminal and a breach of the Geneva Conventions. The centrality of a reliable communications channel in tackling this global pandemic cannot be overstated, as was recently expressed by the UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs.

Apart from allowing individuals and families to access the latest information on how to keep themselves safe from the Corona virus, high-speed internet allows healthcare professionals to be aware of the latest information regarding managing the impending medical crisis as well as to stay in touch with their colleagues around the globe for advice. As we are already seeing in countries across Europe and America, reliable internet also allows day-to-day economic and educational functions to operate substantially during any social-distancing measures, which are central to preventing community spread of this highly contagious disease. It is also urgent to bring to your attention the [grave human rights situation](#) in Jammu and Kashmir and the plight of hundreds of [Kashmiri political prisoners](#), who remain detained in unhygienic conditions in various jails in Kashmir and across India. They are at a grave and increased risk of infection. Global health experts have urged the immediate release of prisoners, and we second these calls.

Given that the transnational, well-respected group [Genocide Watch](#) has already placed [Kashmir on Genocide Alert](#), the genocidal intent of the Indian state is already established. Some of the [public information being distributed by the Indian state](#) wrongly indicates that [asymptomatic people](#) who arrive from areas of contagion or who have been in close proximity to people infected with Covid-19 are “safe” and do not require testing. Moreover, [many people arriving](#)

[from high-infection areas were not tested at the Srinagar airport](#). The first Kashmiri presenting Covid-19 returned from Saudi Arabia on March 16th, and was tested positive only on March 18th. The range of contagion during those two very critical days could have been limited and prevented by strict quarantine, but it was not. Add to this, the uniquely cruel punishment of a deliberately slow internet. The negligence of the Indian State towards Kashmiris' safety can be explicitly seen as criminal and in fact, genocidal.

Through your good offices, we—the multiple Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri scholars, medical as well as public healthcare professionals and academics living across the globe—urge the Indian government to immediately restore high-speed internet connectivity in the region and, unconditionally, release all Kashmiri political prisoners. As Kashmir heads into this pandemic with a severely underdeveloped public health infrastructure and healthcare system, as result of decades of militarization, it is imperative that the Indian government allow its residents to make use of virtual technologies to their maximum potential in order to alleviate the dreadful impact of this virus. Ensuring the alleviation of the pandemic in Kashmir is urgent for Kashmiris as well as for the region and the world.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Further Information:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/indias-internet-shutdown-in-kashmir-is-now-the-longest-ever-in-a-democracy/2019/12/15/bb0693ea-1dfc-11ea-977a-15a6710ed6da_story.html

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/coronavirus-3-more-covid-19-cases-in-ladakh-one-more-in-jk/article31096090.ece>

<https://www.thekashmirmonitor.net/saudi-returned-woman-becomes-first-covid19-case-in-kashmir/>

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/pranavdixit/coronavirus-india-kashmir-internet>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/coronavirus-cases-missed-kashmir-inadequate-testing-claim-doctors/>

<https://kashmirobsvr.net/2020/03/19/population-7-million-ventilators-97-kashmir-braces-for-covid-19/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/mitigate-risks-of-covid-19-for-jammu-and-kashmir-by-immediately-restoring-full-access-to-internet-services/>

<http://kashmirdespatch.com/jkifts-urges-government-to-restore-high-speed-internet-health-and-education-badly-hit-dr-tasaduk/>

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