

To

April 13, 2020

His Excellency

Antonio Gueterres,

Secretary-General, United Nations

CC: All members of the United Nations Security Council,

Robert Mardini, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations

Re: Open letter to the UN Secretary General and the UN Security Council

Request Urgent Action on the fighting on the Line of Control between India and Pakistan

We, the Kashmir Scholars Consultative Action Group, are an interdisciplinary group of scholars of various nationalities engaged in research on the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. We write to seek your immediate intervention in the escalation and expansion of [devastating hostilities](#) in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. On Saturday, April 11 2020, amidst escalating hostilities across the Line of Control (LoC), the [Indian Army set up artillery weapons](#) in civilian populated villages as far as 60 kms by road from the LoC and began indiscriminately targeting civilians in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The shifting of artillery guns into civilian areas was met with protests by locals fearing retaliatory fire and civilian casualties. In response, Indian authorities shut down the Internet in the district of Kupwara, in north Kashmir, disabling access to vital news, information, and emergency services in the midst of armed hostilities and the ongoing pandemic. India has shown a reckless disregard for Kashmiri lives, and is effectively using civilian populations as a human shield in the event of retaliatory fire. The almost unprecedented shelling in these areas has led to widespread panic and displacement. While the world is trying to curb the spread of COVID-19, the Indian army is engaging in acts of aggression and belligerence, including targeting Kashmiri civilians, and placing them in the direct line of retaliatory fire. In the past 24 hours alone, these events

have [cost the lives](#) of 3 Kashmiri civilians, including a woman aged 37, and two minors aged 8 and 16, in Indian administered Kashmir. A man, frightened by shelling, also [succumbed](#) to a heart attack. At least [two civilians](#) have been wounded in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and a [four year old boy killed](#) after he was hit by mortar bombardment. The numbers of civilians killed and injured are increasing on both sides of the LoC. In addition, property and livestock are being damaged and homes burnt.

Over the years frequent hostilities between India and Pakistan disrupt and devastate the lives and livelihoods of communities living along the frontier, who have repeatedly called for the [complete demilitarization of the region](#). The loss of life and property alongside the LoC is a constant nightmare that residents live with. Currently, unprovoked firing on civilians is also potentially interrupting efforts to contain COVID-19. During shelling, which is routine in areas proximate to the LoC, civilians take shelter in community bunkers. These shared bunkers are small enclosed spaces (of approximately 10 x12 ft) where several families squeeze together for the duration of the firing, in violation of WHO guidelines on social distancing, significantly increasing their risk of exposure to COVID-19. People fleeing bombardment from the areas where the Indian artillery has been recently deployed, [stated](#) that they were prevented from leaving by police personnel citing COVID-19 related restrictions on mobility. Pandemic advisories have limited people's access to safer communities and homes of relatives, exacerbating their suffering.

These hostilities refute the principles invoked by the UN Secretary-General Dr. Antonio Guterres, who has [called for a global ceasefire](#) in armed conflicts so that the world can focus on the global pandemic. In defiance of UN Security Council Resolutions, India continues to deny the United Nations Military Observers Group (UNMOGIP) access to areas on its side of the LoC to monitor and report on Ceasefire Violations. The current hostilities are in clear violation of international and bilateral agreements, besides being violations of human rights and humanitarian law principles.

We recently [brought to your attention](#) the illegal and unilateral policy changes carried out by the Indian government during this pandemic by introducing a new domicile law. This followed the unilateral abrogation of Article 370 which established the nominal relationship between India and the State of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019. Scholars have openly called the introduction of this new law as [Israeli-style settler colonialism](#) as it paves the way for deliberate demographic change in the region.

The increasing hostilities and the unprecedented extension of the battlefield into civilian communities, should be seen as part of the continuum of India's belligerent annexation tactics. It is high time that the international conscience reins in the aggressive and [violent ethno nationalist government](#) at the helm of India today. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) must not fail to uphold its principled commitments regarding Jammu and Kashmir at this critical time. The UNSC must reiterate its position and remind the relevant state parties of their commitments and obligations towards Jammu and Kashmir.

The peoples of Jammu and Kashmir face grave and immediate threats after decades of state violence, denial of rights, massive human rights violations, and the silence and inaction of the international community. That tragedy is now fast-moving towards a situation of forced demographic change and a threat of another war in the region. In the absence of international attention and action, it is of grave concern that the role of the Indian military will further expand during the COVID-19 emergency, and in the enforcement of the new domicile law.

In the interests of the peoples of Jammu and Kashmir, world peace and stability, you must act now.

Sincerely,

Kashmir Scholars Consultative and Action Network (KSCAN)

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Haley Duschinski, Associate Professor, Ohio University, USA

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