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**Kashmir Scholars Consultative and Action Network**  
***Stop Arrests of Human Rights Defenders in Kashmir***  
**Public Statement on the Arrests of Irfan Mehraj and Khurram Parvez**  
**April 1, 2023**

As Kashmir scholars, we submit this statement to express our deep concern over the Government of India's intensified repression of human rights work in the disputed region of Indian-Administered Jammu & Kashmir (IAJK) targeting the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) through the arrest of Irfan Mehraj and the second arrest of Khurram Parvez in a terror-related case. Both of these arrests have taken place in connection with a First Information Report (FIR), [RC-37/2020/NIA/DLI](#), filed by the agency in October 2020 in New Delhi under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Indian Penal Code. These arrests epitomize the Government of India's strategy of criminalizing journalists and defenders of human rights with the aim of silencing and terrorizing all voices that document the legal and political realities of Kashmir.

On March 20, 2023, Irfan Mehraj was summoned while covering a story on professional assignment and subsequently arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), India's central counter-terrorist task force. Irfan Mehraj is a Srinagar-based freelance journalist who previously worked as a JKCCS researcher. The founding editor of [Wande Magazine](#) and a senior editor at [TwoCircles.net](#), he has contributed to leading news publications like *The Indian Express*, *Al Jazeera*, *Himal Southasian*, *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, and *TRT World*. He joins Kashmiri journalists Fahad Shah, Aasif Sultan, and Sajad Gul, among others, who have been detained for writing and reporting on Kashmir. Following his arrest, the NIA issued a [press release](#) identifying him as "a close associate of Khurram Parvez."

Khurram Parvez is the JKCCS Program Coordinator who is already [incarcerated](#) in a separate terror-related case – FIR [RC-30/2021/NIA/DLI](#) – since November 2021, with the [chargesheet](#) filed in May 2022. His name has now been added to the case with Irfan Mehraj. Khurram Parvez's work as a human rights defender has been globally acknowledged, and he is the recipient of several international awards honoring his untiring work.

**The current case targets JKCCS as a human rights organization.** On March 21, 2023, an [NIA spokesman stated](#) that "JKCCS was funding terror activities in the valley and had also been in the propagation of a secessionist agenda in the Valley under *the garb of protection of human rights*" [emphasis added]. The 2020 FIR casts a wide net of allegations, stating that "NGOs, Trusts and Societies, registered as well as un-registered, are collecting funds domestically and abroad through donations, business contributions etc. in the name of charity and various welfare activities such as public health, education etc. Some of these NGOs have links with proscribed terrorist organisation [sic]." It also **explicitly criminalizes, under counter-terror law, human rights documentation and reporting** by stating that "these NGOs, Trusts and Societies and their members, by words and written means, publish anti-national and incriminating material to bring into hatred, contempt and disaffection towards the Government of India." This 2020 FIR has provided the basis for prolonged and ongoing interrogations of journalists, associates, and researchers; other human rights defenders may also be arrested in this case in the near future.

Over the past week, nationalist media platforms have amplified the state's narrative locating JKCCS at the heart of a global "[separatist intellectual ecosystem](#)" and "[separatist-terrorist ecosystem](#)" that includes UN officials, international human rights organizations, journalists, and scholars. This exemplifies the Government

of India's long-standing and now escalating pattern of using colonial counter-terrorism laws to intimidate, threaten, and criminalize human rights activists, journalists, scholars and public health, education, and social justice activists. This tactic effectively terrorizes all civil society in Kashmir while labeling resistance groups as "terrorists," thus outlawing them and any and all association with them. In a [press statement](#) on March 24, 2023, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, stated: "The Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) carries out essential work monitoring human rights. Their research and analysis of human rights violations are of huge value, including to international organisations seeking to ensure accountability and non-repetition of abuses."

**As Kashmir scholars, we emphasize that JKCCS has always operated as an internationally respected human rights documentation center and civil society institution. Over the years, they have published several critically important human rights reports including [Buried Evidence](#) (2009), [Alleged Perpetrators](#) (December 2012), [Structures of Violence](#) (September 2015), [Torture](#) (May 2019), and [Kashmir's Internet Siege](#) (August 2020), among others, that have rigorously and meticulously documented India's ongoing human rights violations in Kashmir. JKCCS reports are based on methodologically conscientious field research and scrupulous data collection practices. They meet the highest standards of research and scholarship. This comprehensive documentation has been extensively cited in the academic work of many scholars researching and writing on Kashmir, including those in KSCAN. It has immense value for those monitoring and reporting on human rights in India, for example, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), the US State Department, and the UN Special Procedures mandates comprising independent experts. Over the past decade, JKCCS research and its documentation has acquired even greater significance due to India's escalation of press censorship and refusal of access to scholars and human rights monitors, including the UN Special Rapporteurs, to Kashmir.**

The [silencing in Kashmir has reached an unprecedented dimension since 2019](#) following the illegal annexation of IJK in clear violation of international law. The Government of India has increasingly criminalized and limited all forms of expression – journalistic, academic, legal, photographic, and via social media. India has fallen to 150 (out of 180) in the [World Press Freedom Index \(2022\)](#), an annual ranking by the non-profit [Reporters Without Borders](#) – its lowest ranking ever. There is [constant illegal surveillance of online platforms](#) and a new and strikingly [draconian media policy in Jammu & Kashmir](#) since June 2020, such that nearly all news media have been reduced to mere mouth pieces for the Government. The fear of incarceration is all too real for activists and journalists, [especially those from Kashmir](#).

KSCAN urgently requests all organizations and individuals of conscience to join [Amnesty International](#), [Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights](#) (OMCT and FIDH), [Human Rights Watch](#), [Frontline Defenders](#), [People's Union for Democratic Rights](#), [Journalist Federation of Kashmir](#), [All India Lawyers' Association for Justice](#), [Press Club of India](#), and [Human Rights Watch](#) in urgently calling for the immediate release of Irfan Mehraj and Khurram Parvez, as well as incarcerated journalists Fahad Shah, Aasif Sultan and Sajad Gul, among others, and for an immediate end to the criminalization of human rights documentation, journalism, and research in Kashmir.

*The Kashmir Scholars Consultative and Advocacy Network is an interdisciplinary group of scholars of various nationalities engaged in research on the region of Kashmir. Our research on the Kashmir conflict addresses its history, its consequences for the region and beyond, and its possible resolution. It examines the implications for an internationally mediated political solution, and is of relevance to policy makers.*

Email: [kashmirscholarsnetwork@protonmail.com](mailto:kashmirscholarsnetwork@protonmail.com)

Website: [www.kashmirscholarsnetwork.org](http://www.kashmirscholarsnetwork.org)

## **Institutional and Organizational Endorsements of the KSCAN Statement**

Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD)  
Americans for Kashmir  
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)  
Canadian BDS Coalition  
Canadians for Peace and Justice in Kashmir  
Detention Solidarity  
Friends of Sabeel of North America (FOSNA)  
Hamilton Coalition To Stop The War  
Hindus for Human Rights  
India Justice Project, Berlin  
International Action Center  
International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances  
Islamophobia Studies Center  
Just Peace Advocates / Mouvement Pour Une Paix Juste  
Justice for All  
Justice For All Canada  
Kashmir Law & Justice Project  
Kashmir-Palestine Scholars Solidarity Network  
Lausan Collective, Hong Kong  
Let Kashmir Decide  
Montreal for a World BEYOND War  
National Federation of Indian Women  
Palestinian and Jewish Unity (PAJU)  
Project South, Atlanta  
Quebec Public Interest Research Group at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada  
Rafto Foundation for Human Rights  
RootsAction Education Fund  
Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network  
Socialist Action / Ligue Pour l'Action Socialiste  
South Asia Solidarity Group, UK  
Stoke White Investigations  
The Center for Cultural Power  
The Civic Coalition, Jerusalem  
University Network for Human Rights  
World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)

## **Scholars, Journalists and Activists Signing in Solidarity with the KSCAN Statement**

dyuti a, University of Sussex  
Rabab Abdulhadi, Director, Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies, San Francisco State University  
Lila Abu-Lughod, Columbia University  
Nadia Abu-Zahra, University of Ottawa  
Dean Accardi, Connecticut College  
Vaqar Adhami, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Omer Aijazi, University of Victoria and University of British Columbia  
Heba Al Adawy, Australian National University

Samar Al-Bulushi, UC Irvine  
Gaye-Frances Alexander, Raging Grannies Toronto  
Nosheen Ali, New York University  
Sharib A. Ali, University of Bern  
Ian Almond, Georgetown University in Qatar  
Prof. Aman, Jindal Global University  
Vivek Anand, Psychotherapist  
Ruhail Andrabi, University of California San Diego  
Ovimir Anjum, University of Toledo  
Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman, Human Rights Defender  
Mary Aileen D. Bacalso, International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED)  
Paola Bacchetta, University of California, Berkeley  
Amit Baishya, University of Oklahoma  
Dhruva Balram, Journalist  
Subhasis Bandyopadhyay, Indian Institute of Engineering Science and Technology, Shibpur  
Jenny Bangham, Queen Mary University of London  
Zaki Barzinji, Americans for Kashmir  
Hatem Bazian, UC Berkeley and Zaytuna College  
Victoria Bernal, University of California, Irvine  
Anuradha Bhasin, Journalist  
Claire Bidwell, Schoolteacher, Human Rights Activist, and Let Kashmir Decide Founder  
Somak Biswas, University of Warwick  
Elizabeth Block, Independent Jewish Voices  
Conor Bollins, University of East Anglia  
Pankaj Butalia, Documentary Filmmaker  
Judith Galarza Campos, Fedefam-México  
Irina Ceric, University of Windsor Faculty of Law  
Angana Chatterji, University of California, Berkeley  
Aadita Chaudhury, York University, Toronto, Canada  
Dobby Chew, Executive Coordinator, Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network  
Sheetal Chhabria, Connecticut College  
Mohd Abuzar Choudhary, Independent Journalist  
Artemis Christinaki, The University of Manchester  
Frances Combs, United Church of Canada Clergy  
Liesbeth Corens, Queen Mary University of London  
Molly Cunningham, University of Chicago  
Dia Da Costa, University of Alberta  
Alex Da Costa, University of Alberta  
Jamil Dakwar, Adjunct Lecturer, Hunter College and New York University  
Huma Dar, Critical Studies Program, California College of the Arts  
Basit Dar, University of Ottawa  
Riddhi Dastidar, Independent Writer  
Vinicius Tavares de Oliveira, Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, Brazil  
Nandini Deo, Lehigh University  
Khalil Dewan, Stoke White Investigations (SWI)  
Meena Dhanda, International Solidarity for Academic Freedom in India  
Gordon Doctorow, Nova Southeastern University  
Tara Dorabji, Journalist & Author  
Tara Dorabji, Vice President, The Center for Cultural Power

Mariam Durrani, American University  
Haley Duschinski, Ohio University  
Rebekah Edwards, California College of Arts  
Yves Engler, Author  
John L. Esposito, Georgetown University  
Azad Essa, Middle East Eye  
Mohammad Fadel, University of Toronto Faculty of Law  
Syed Fai, World Council for Peace & Justice  
Joey Faustino, Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances  
Sareer Fazili, Attorney At Law  
Margaret Ferguson, University of California at Davis  
K.J. Brito Fernando, Families of the Disappeared, Sri Lanka  
Nancy Gallagher, California Scholars for Academic Freedom  
Poulami Somanya Ganguly, Queen Mary University of London  
Arijeet Ghosh, Jindal Global Law School, Jindal Global University  
Ekabali Ghosh, SOAS, University of London  
Sahana Ghosh, Anthropologist  
Ozlem Goner, City University of New York  
Priyamvada Gopal, University of Cambridge  
Rebecca Gould, University of Birmingham  
Hans Peter Graf, Fondation pour la Formation des Aînées et Aînés de Genève  
Inderpal Grewal, Yale University  
Claudine Grisard, Queen Mary University of London  
Imtiaz Gul, Writer  
Arjun Guneratne, Macalester College  
Muna Haddad, Human Rights Lawyer  
Joyce Hall, Just Earth  
Jason Hannan, University of Winnipeg, Canada  
Mohammed Mominul Haque, Peace And Justice Alliance  
Omar Shukry Haramy, Kumi Now Network  
Christopher Helali, Dartmouth College  
Cheryl Higashida, University of Colorado, Boulder  
Julian Hough, Swansea University  
J. Shelby House, Anthropology, University of Washington  
Anneeth Kaur Hundle, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Presidential Chair in Social Sciences to Advance Sikh Studies, University of California, Irvine  
Shahla Hussain, St. John's University  
Maria Iorillo, Wisewoman Childbirth Traditions  
Mehmood Irfan, PhD Student, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology  
Feyzi Ismail, Goldsmiths, University of London  
Leslie James, Queen Mary University of London  
Chinnaiah Jangam, Carleton University  
Rubina Jasani, University of Manchester  
Fernando Javier Loayza Jordán, Yale University  
Muhamad Junaid, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts  
Virinder Kalra, University of Warwick  
Mohamed Kanji, Medical Doctor  
Hafsa Kanjwal, Lafayette College  
Caren Kaplan, University of California, Davis

Maria Kasstan, Toronto Raging Grannies Canada  
Suvir Kaul, University of Pennsylvania  
J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Wesleyan University  
Khushdeep Kaur, Temple University  
Nancy Vernon Kelly, Lutheran Pastor  
Jennifer Kelly, University of California, Santa Cruz  
Hassane Kemmoun, Moroccan Truth and Justice Forum (FMVJ Maroc)  
Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, University of Michigan  
Sang Kil, San Jose State University  
Mandal Kinkar, Research Scholar  
David Klein, California State University Northridge  
Shweta Krishnan, George Washington University  
Elizabeth Lee, Canada Peace Network  
Michael Letwin, Former President, Assn. of Legal Aid Attorneys/UAW 2325  
John Liss, Lawyer  
Jinee Lokaneeta, Professor, Drew University  
John Lougheed, Retired Minister, United Church of Canada  
Anna Maria Luera, Activist  
Nidhi Mahajan, University of California, Santa Cruz  
Ershad Mahmud, Analyst  
Inshah Malik, New Vision University  
Wendy Matsumura, University of California, San Diego  
Tim McSorley, Civil Liberties and Human Rights Activist  
Alanksha Mehta, Goldsmiths, University of London  
Peggy Merz, 1000 Grandmothers for Future Generations  
Mercedes Mignone, Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora  
Judith Miller, First United Church Ottawa  
Imraan Mir, Kashmir Law & Justice Project  
shabana mir, American Islamic College  
Touseef Mir, University of Bath  
Abdulla Moaswes, University of Exeter  
Chris Moffat, Queen Mary University of London  
Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Syracuse University  
Janet Montefiore, University of Kent, Canterbury, U.K.  
Patricia Morton, University of California, Riverside  
Solange Mouthaan, School of Law, University of Warwick  
Farhan Mujahid, Qatar University  
Suciwati Munir, Committee Action Solidarity for Munir  
Shifa Naeem, Psychiatrist  
Ruhan Nagra, University of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law  
Shalini Nair, University of Sussex  
Saumya Ranjan Nath, University of Sussex  
Vasuki Nesiiah, New York University  
Renee Nunan-Rappard, Human Rights for All (HR4A)  
Melissa O'Donnell, Australian Human Rights Lawyer  
Iver Ørstavik, Rafto Foundation for Human Rights  
Goldie Osuri, University of Warwick  
Tod Overstreet, Activist  
Subhajit Pal, Phd Student University at Albany

Cristina Palabay, Karapatan Philippines  
David Palumbo-Liu, Stanford University  
Idrisa Pandit, Luther College, Wilfrid Laurier University  
Niharika Pandit, London School of Economics  
Shaista Patel, University of California, San Diego  
Shantha D. Pathirana, Activist  
Somak Paul, Assistant Professor, California State University  
Yusuf Perwez, Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (ASATA)  
Sharri Plonski, Queen Mary University of London  
Susan Power, Al-Haq  
Nicola Pratt, University of Warwick  
Abdessamad Qesmi, Islamic council of new England  
Srikrupa Raghunathan, Queen Mary University of London  
Amit S. Raj, Dutch Art Institute  
Fatima Rajina, Stephen Lawrence Research Centre, De Montfort University  
Shivangi Mariam Rajina, The Funambulist  
Omar M. Ramahi, University of Waterloo  
Ratna Raman, Professor, SVC Delhi University  
M. V. Ramana, University of British Columbia, Vancouver  
Norma Rantisi, Concordia University  
Nagesh Rao, Colgate University  
Francesca Recchia, The Polis Project  
Zohar Chamberlain Regev, Activist  
Rush Rehm, Professor, Theater and Classics, Stanford University  
Shams Rehman, JKTV  
Cabeiri Robinson, University of Washington  
Svend Robinson, Former Canadian MP  
Karen Rodman, Just Peace Advocates  
Favianna Rodriguez, Artist and Activist  
Lisa Rofel, University of California, Santa Cruz  
Penny Rosenwasser, City College of San Francisco  
Stuart A. Ross, World Beyond War  
Aroosa Runga, Columnist  
Adelheid Russenberger, Queen Mary University of London  
Cassandra Ryan, Toronto Raging Grannies  
Sana Saboowala, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign  
Elizabeth Saldana, Princeton University  
Rakshi Saleem, Lesley University  
Tanroop Sandhu, Queen Mary University of London  
Mary Scully, Let Kashmir Decide Coalition  
Daniel Segal, Pitzer College  
Jhuma Sen, Independent Legal Practitioner  
Meheli Sen, Rutgers University  
Alpa Shah, London School of Economics  
Mubeen Shah, CEO Kashmir House Turkey  
Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Visiting, University of California, Los Angeles  
Elora Shehabuddin, University of California, Berkeley  
Arfat Sheikh, World Kashmir Awareness Forum  
Moazzam Sheikh, San Francisco Public Library

Omid Shekari, University of Pittsburgh  
Dina M. Siddiqi, New York University  
James Silk, Binger Clinical Professor of Human Rights, Yale Law School  
Sonny Singh, Musician and Activist  
Taveeshi Singh, Syracuse University  
Lotika Singha, International Solidarity for Academic Freedom in India  
Mohamedou Ould Slahi, Writer and Human Rights Activist  
Martin Sökefeld, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich  
Sammitha Sreevathsa, University of California, Riverside  
Tarangini Sriraman, Goldsmiths, University of London  
Kavita Srivastava, People's Union for Civil Liberties, India  
Ann Stewart, School of Law University of Warwick UK  
Debbie Stothard, Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma  
Aparna Sundar, Independent Scholar  
Mayur Suresh, SOAS University of London  
Raja Swamy, University of Tennessee  
Saranga Ugalmugle, Lawyer and Researcher, University of Windsor  
Nishant Upadhyay, University of Colorado, Boulder  
Vasanthi Venkatesh, University of Windsor, Faculty of Law  
Anthony Vinoth, Human Rights Activist  
Neha Vora, Lafayette College  
Mirza Waheed, Novelist  
Harsha Walia, Author  
Roger Waters, Musician and Activist  
Regina Weldon, Al Jazeera  
CJ Werleman, Byline Times  
Jennifer Whitfield, Activist  
Howard Winant, University of California, Santa Barbara  
Vincent Wong, Assistant Professor, University of Windsor Faculty of Law  
Waseem Yaqoob, Queen Mary University of London  
Emma Yates, School of History, QMUL  
Seema Yousuf, Emory University  
Masrat Zahra, Journalist/Research Scholar, University of Michigan  
Anam Zakaria, Therapist and Writer  
Soraya Zaroob, University of California, Riverside