

On the Mumbai Terror Attacks: Supporting the Human Chain in Mumbai on Dec. 10th

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Focus on the Global South supports the call for a human chain in Mumbai on 10 December 2008 (International Human Rights Day) by the Mumbai for Peace campaign, as a people's response to the recent attacks on Mumbai.

The tragic and horrific events that unfolded from 26 November in the city and continued for the next 3 days were not the first terror attack on Mumbai, but are by far the most brazen. The attacks not only took the lives of ordinary people, but also of top security personnel. Among the 195 people reported killed are 20 police officials, two National Security Guard (NSG) commandos and 20 foreigners. At least 295 people have been injured, many seriously. The attackers fired indiscriminately at people at multiple locations, including the crowded Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) station, public roads, and two luxury hotels. They then holed up with hostages in these two hotels and a residential building housing Israeli families. The Army, Navy and the NSG worked with the local police to finally overpower and shoot the killers.

Although the Indian Authorities say that most of the attackers are of Pakistani origin, their identities have yet to be firmly established. But the sophisticated nature of this operation indicates that the attackers were highly trained and that the attacks were planned well in advance with precise knowledge of target areas. The Mumbai police was pushed into tackling a serious situation that they were untrained and ill-equipped for. Although they fought bravely, they were no match for the superior training and equipment of the attackers. These traumatic events have yet again brought to the fore issues of hate and terror, the shocking lack of preparedness of India's security and intelligence agencies, and the complete absence of an action plan on the part of the Indian Government to respond quickly and effectively to such attacks.

Meanwhile, the double-speak and hypocrisy of mainstream political parties continue. Both, the ruling Congress Party as well as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seem more intent on laying the blame for the attacks on 'neighbouring countries' than on examining the failure of India's intelligence and security apparatus. Adherents of the Hindu right advocate divisive and destructive politics that condone 'ethnic cleansing' of minorities and terrorist actions in the name of Hinduism. History shows that identifying scapegoats in terror attacks is fraught with as much danger as the attacks themselves.

Combating terrorism needs political will on the part of the Indian and other Governments to ensure high levels of institutional, strategic and technical collaboration. Military campaigns, draconian 'anti-terrorist' legislation and indiscriminate arrests that violate the human rights of innocent people will not ensure the safety of people, societies and nations. The deep roots of various kinds of anti-people violence need to be understood and addressed head-on, including for example, simmering and continuing conflicts in the sub-continent, deteriorating India-Pakistan relations, heightening resentment against Indian occupation in Kashmir, communalism, and attacks on any group based on ethnicity, caste, religion and culture.

All forms of violence brutalize people and destroy societies regardless of whether they are impelled

by jehad, Hindutva, crusades or Zionism. At this critical moment, progressive social actors must join hands to oppose war-mongering and attempts by any group or force to whip up sectarian frenzy in the name of fighting terror.

It is time that the people of Mumbai stood up, united as Indians and as human beings, to work towards social justice and lasting peace, and to demand for full accountability from the Government and political forces for these tragic attacks.

Focus supports the main demands made by the Mumbai for Peace campaign:

- Government must take responsibility and map out long term and short term strategies, and take action on them.
- Better coordination amongst various security and intelligence agencies to deal with terror; and sharing of intelligence and information.
- Punishment of those responsible for attacks on minorities, which are also an attack on the majority and the multi-cultural body politic of India.
- Swift, transparent and credible trial and punishment for all those involved in terror, whatever the religion they may profess.
- A comprehensive Communal Violence Bill in place of the one pending in Parliament.
- Immediate implementation of Police reforms, providing equipment and training, basic service conditions to police personnel and state security forces.
- Ensuring moderation and sensitivity in media reporting of violence whether terrorist or any other form, through self-regulation or fiat.
- Evolve a policy for legal action against hate speech and demonization of any religion or community.

These can be the initial steps towards achieving peace and combating terror in India and the sub continent. Focus calls upon the people of Mumbai, of India and the rest of the world, to support these demands.

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