

JOINT STATEMENT

Outcome of Pakistan-India Foreign Ministers' meeting in Islamabad: A Joint Statement issued by Pakistani and Indian peace and human rights activists

Tuesday 11 September 2012, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 9 September 2012).

We, the Pakistani and Indian signatories of this joint statement, welcome the positive outcome of the just-concluded Pakistan-India foreign ministers' talks in Islamabad, especially with regard to the newly announced liberalized and relaxed visa regime.

The proposed new visa regime for the time being benefits only certain selected categories of visitors. But, we are conscious of the fact that while assessing the outcome of the talks, one cannot ignore the related backdrop of an inter-state relationship, which has been marred for decades by bitterness and an acute trust deficit, preventing the people of our two countries from living as friendly neighbours and prospering in a climate of peace and harmony through mutual cooperation and collaboration. Nevertheless, we are confident that the policy makers in the two countries are not unmindful of the fact that the free interaction of the common Pakistanis and Indians is the key to the development of a relationship of mutual understanding, lasting friendship and durable peace. For this to happen, it is imperative that the benefit of the visa liberalization and relaxation reaches the common citizens of the two countries, by adopting the following measures:

- Consulates should be opened by the two governments in cities such as Karachi, Hyderabad and Lahore in Pakistan and Mumbai, Hyderabad (Deccan), Jalandhar, Chennai and Calcutta in India, to provide easy and less expensive access to them;
- The cumbersome and humiliating condition of police reporting is eliminated altogether.
- Urgent steps are taken to facilitate access to information by allowing the free and unfettered movement of each other's newspapers, journals and other publications and removing the curbs on watching each other's news channels.

As the two governments have expressed their commitment to jointly tackle the growing menace of religious intolerance, extremism and violence, one urgent task they should undertake is to set up a joint commission of experts - historians and educationists of impeccable integrity - to review the school text books in vogue in the two countries, in a bid to identify all the inter-faith and inter-state hate material contained in them and suggest effective ways to remove them from the school curriculum.

While welcoming the decision to release the fishermen languishing for years in each other's jails, we believe that this decision will be meaningful only if concrete measures are taken to put a permanent full stop to the inhuman practice of arresting the poor fishermen and seizing their boats at sea in the future. We also welcome the decision to release other categories of prisoners including those

suffering from ailments. In this context, the decision to ensure implementation of the agreement on consular access in letter and spirit, including immediate notification of arrests by either side and consular access to all such persons within three months of arrests, release of prisoners within one month of completion of sentence and confirmation of their national status is a long-awaited but welcome one, provided of course, that these decisions are implemented without further delay.

We also believe that if the two countries are to make further meaningful progress towards evolving a relationship of lasting peace and friendship, it is also important to address in the coming days the doable issues such as Siachen and Sir Creek on which a great deal of useful work has already been done.

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