



Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms (CPDR)

Office no 192 C, First floor, Sajid plaza, Sector C/2, Mirpur, AJK
cpdr@cpdr.org.pk | cpdrajk@gmail.com

www.cpdr.org.pk

Date: 24 Apr 2019

Press Release

Campaign for empowered local governments kicks start in Azad Jammu and Kashmir

21st April, 2019



Around two dozen activists from various political parties, youth groups and civil society got together and decided to start a campaign for the early initiation of local bodies' elections in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. It is the first civic initiative of its sort where people, cutting across the party lines, have demonstrated a keen interest in organizing a joint campaign geared towards substantive reforms in the governance of the region.

The activity was convened by the Center for Peace, Development and Reforms (CPDR) in collaboration with the political parties of AJ&K.



Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Syed Waqas Ali Kausar, Head of the Department of Governance and Public Policy in National University of Modern Languages (NUML) briefed the audience about the background of local bodies in AJ&K and shared some statistical data to argue that development is directly proportional to the decentralization of power which hasn't happened in AJ&K in last two decades.

The President of Pakistan People's Party AJ&K chapter, Chaudhary Latif Akbar was also present on the occasion. He threw light on the technical and strategic hurdles in the commencement of local bodies and acknowledged that the political elite as well as the powerful bureaucracy are against the devolution of financial and legislative powers to the grass-roots. Appreciating the initiative, he pledged his party's full-fledged support to gear up awareness campaign about youth participation in the local bodies and early elections.

The young activists present on the occasion were very critical of the Government's lethargic attitude in convening the local bodies' elections. Raja Mansoor Khan, the Additional General Secretary of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf AJ&K chapter affirmed that his party will leave no stone unturned in supporting the local bodies' and will support such civic initiatives geared towards participatory governance.

The Executive Director, Center for Peace, Development and Reforms, Mr. Ershad Mahmud explained to the audience that after the 13th amendment in the Interim Constitution of AJ&K, the local bodies' setup has become a mandatory feature of the constitution and the incumbent government in AJ&K is duty bound to hold these elections at the earliest. He encouraged the young activists to explore the legal dimensions of this issue and strive to hold every institution accountable if it's not performing well.

After a rigorous discussion and consultation, a consensus emerged in the group that not only local bodies' elections but student unions' elections are also very important to provide opportunities to the youth emerging from grass-roots. It was decided that through newspaper articles, media interviews and mobilization on social media; the scope of the campaign will be expanded and the early convening of student union elections will also be pressed upon in the campaign.

Other activists present on the occasion include Saqib Farooq and Amir Gorski from Peoples' Students Federation; Mati-ur-Rehman Abbasi, Rizwan Inqalabi and Hammad Gilani from Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf; Jawad Aslam, Sana Sarwar and Zobia Raja from the State Youth Assembly; Khizar Hayat, Asim Abbasi and Hafeez-Ullah from Jamat-e-Islami; Shoaib Shaukat and Muhammad Awais from All Jammu Kashmir Muslim Conference and Nabila Ayub along with Fatimah Anwar representing the women wing of Pakistan Peoples' Party.

The meeting concluded with the establishment of a committee to take the campaign forward and it was agreed upon that this coordination committee will organize meetings with the party leaders of the mainstream parties to forge a consensus on the agenda of local bodies.