



Benazir Bhutto
Leader of the Opposition
Islamic Republic of Pakistan

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

June 15 1998

The Honorable Tony Blair
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

C/O The Honorable Sir John Weston
Ambassador to the United Nations
The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The nuclear devices detonated by India and Pakistan over the course of the last three weeks finally and without ambiguity achieve a state of nuclear parity in South Asia.

As you know, however, achieving nuclear parity does not deter war, it only deters nuclear war. Any further testing, or, more unsettling, deployment by either Pakistan or India can only heighten tensions in a region dangerously close to open hostilities.

South Asia cannot afford a costly arms race, the result of which can be only further impoverishment of our peoples.

We are well aware of the extraordinary steps you and other world leaders have taken to reduce tensions in the region. And, while we appreciate and support efforts by the international community to seek between Pakistan and India a "no first use" pledge, cessation of further tests and a refrain from any active deployment, these steps in isolation will not address the real security concerns of our people.

This is the time for the international community to put aside its punitive measures (sanctions will not put the nuclear genie back in the bottle), and immediately and with vigor assume a pro-active, constructive and positive role in the worsening South Asian crisis.

For, in the end, the international community must come to see that the South Asian arms race in itself is not the crisis, rather the intractable conflict of Kashmir.

Two of the three Indo-Pak wars have been fought over Kashmir. Since 1989 alone, over 40,000 people - a conservative estimate - have died in the struggle for 'Azadi', or freedom. India has stationed over 600,000 troops in Jammu-Kashmir.

**Open Letter to the Prime Minister
of the United Kingdom**

June 15, 1998

Page #2

Mr. Prime Minister, resolve Kashmir, South Asia's flash point, and we take a great step forward in preventing a nuclear race.

There are solutions. Pakistan and particularly India would benefit from active leadership from the world powers. First and foremost, the international community should immediately empower the UN Security Council with a vigorous mandate to find a mediated solution to the half-century conflict, keeping in mind the aspirations of the Kashmir people.

Secondly, South Asia needs an honest broker to mediate a dispute that remains the longest unresolved agenda item of the Security Council.

Specifically, we feel that the United States can and should chair a peace process for Kashmir, in conjunction with China, Russia and Britain. Your country has already indicated its willingness to assist. The American envoy to Ireland was successful there; it is a model that may also have a salutary affect in South Asia.

No process leading to the fair and equitable resolution of the fifty-year Kashmir conflict can move forward, however, without concrete steps by both Pakistan and India. On India's part, there are a number of confidence-building measures to be taken immediately, including:

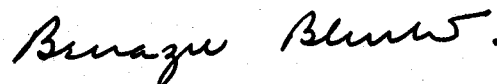
- A dramatic reduction of the nearly 600,000 troops stationed in Kashmir.
- Ceasing all forms of torture, intimidation and extra-judicial killings.
- Opening Jammu-Kashmir to monitoring by international human rights groups.

Likewise, on the part of Pakistan, it is high time that we consider:

- Providing observer status for the rightful representatives of the people of Kashmir, namely the All-Party Hurriyat Conference, in all deliberations.
- Softening borders in conjunction with India to allow freer movement between families, increasing trade and strengthening cultural ties.

The time has come for all South Asians to realize that we cannot bequeath to the coming century the bitterness of the past. Nuclear parity demands a maturity that we no longer have the luxury to ignore. For this, we need your active and concerted leadership beyond the nuclear issue.

Sincerely,



(Benazir Bhutto)