

“The ceasefire is just the first step in the long walk to justice and peace”

Feminists from India and Pakistan

We, feminists from India and Pakistan, unequivocally welcome the ceasefire declared by our two nations today. The tension and escalation of the last fortnight remind us of how fragile peace is. The ceasefire is also a vindication of calls for de-escalation and peace by lakhs of ordinary people on both sides of the border. Even as we hope this indicates an absolute cessation of hostilities, we recall the recent events.

We condemn the terror attack in Pahalgam that killed 25 tourists visiting Kashmir from different parts of India and one from Nepal. One local person also lost his life in the Pahalgam attack. The targeted attacks deepened the communal divide between Muslims and Hindus in India and were exploited to incite hatred, fear, and calls for collective punishment.

In the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack, it is the women—including as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives—who are left holding the unbearable weight of grief. Instead of respecting and sharing it, it has been weaponized and policed—especially when it refuses to follow the script of hate. Himanshi Narwal, the young widow of one of the slain victims, was among the survivors who amid unimaginable pain still found the strength to appeal for peace. She asked people not to direct their rage against Kashmiris and Muslims who, like her, are trapped in a cycle of violence they did not create. For that simple act of humanity, she has been trolled, vilified, and attacked by chest-thumping nationalists more committed to blood lust than truth.

Linking the terror attack with Pakistan, India immediately suspended the Indus Water Treaty, and revived hydro-electric projects and dam construction previously constrained by the treaty. Both sides cancelled short-term visas for visitors. We have witnessed heartbreaking scenes from the Attari-Wagah border where Indian and Pakistani women with the ‘wrong’ passports were forced to hand over their children to their husbands before crossing over to ‘their countries’,

creating unfathomable distress for the women themselves, their children and their families. Fourteen days later, India carried out air strikes and Pakistan retaliated, followed by drone strikes by both countries.

Misinformation campaigns on both sides have made truth difficult to ascertain. One thing is certain: the loss of human life, widespread fear and an escalating spiral of violence alongside the possible terror of grave and irreversible ramifications for people across South Asia as a whole that tensions between the two nuclear powers could result in.

We, as feminists, are fundamentally anti-war and anti-militarism. We denounce the war economy that thrives on violence and destruction, and the deeply patriarchal structures that fuel and sustain it. The naming of India’s operation as *Sindoor*, a profoundly patriarchal gesture, is a stark reminder of the misogynistic propaganda employed by both sides. Between loved ones there are also many other private and specific symbols, of which *Sindoor*, to some women, could be one. But when *Sindoor* becomes a war cry it erases and weaponises pain, and reduces women to bodies on which the masculinist nationalist fantasies of conquest, violence and rape are mounted.

The past year has been marked by a surge in global violence, with devastating images from Gaza and other conflict zones becoming a daily occurrence, tragically desensitising many to the true horrors of armed conflict. Indian and Pakistani governments and opinion-makers seem uncaring of the catastrophic consequences of war and the immense devastation it would cause. Only those who are manufacturing and selling weapon systems to our governments will benefit from war. War further entrenches, exacerbates and perpetuates existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting women, gender and religious minorities as well as children. Such hostilities serve as a distraction from what people really need: education, health, employment, social protection, safety and well-being.

We, feminists from India and Pakistan, firmly believe that war is never the solution. We call for a dismantling of power structures that sustain violence. The logic of war—rooted in nationalism, toxic masculinity, and colonial-era borders—must be rejected. In both countries, women activists, journalists, and peace-builders have long advocated for dialogue, de-escalation, and diplomacy. Yet, our voices are consistently sidelined and overwhelmed by the inflammatory rhetoric and assertive militarism that dominate the public sphere.

We call on the governments of India and Pakistan:

- To consolidate the 10th May ceasefire, desist from cross-border violations and defuse rising tensions by keeping channels of communication open;
- To jointly initiate an investigation, including international representatives, into the Pahalgam attack with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice.
- To refrain from unilateral actions such as disrupting the Indus Waters Treaty;
- To prioritise and engage in dialogue and diplomacy to resolve differences.
- To work towards resolving the core political issue of Kashmir that lies at the heart of the conflict.

We urge feminists around the world to raise their voices in solidarity and join us in resisting war and building peace. There is no time or space for complacency.

11 May 2025.

Group Endorsements:

Saheli Women's Resource Centre, New Delhi, India; Women's Action Forum (WAF), All Chapters, Pakistan; Aurat March, Lahore, Pakistan; All India Democratic Women's Association, India.

Individual Endorsements (in alphabetical order):

Abha Bhaiyya, Aisha Gazdar, Amar Sindhu, Amrita Chhachi, Anita Pinjani, Anuradha Banerji, Arfana Mallah, Avantika Tewari, Ayesha Kidwai, Beena Sarwar, Chayanika Shah, Devangana Kalita, Elaine Alam, Farrah Taufiq, Farida Shaheed, Gulbadan Javed, Haseen Musarat, Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, Humaira Rahman, Iram Hashmi, Kalyani Menon Sen, Kavita Krishnan, Kausar Khan, Khawar Mumtaz, Lalita Ramdas, Madhu Bhushan, Maimoona Mollah, Malka Khan, Maria Rasheed, Mariam Dhawale, Meera Sanghamitra, Nageen Hyat, Naheed Aziz, Najam Panhwar, Natasha Narwal, Naseem Jalbani, Nasim Jalbani, Nasreen Azhar, Neelam Hussain, Nighat Said Khan, Nivedita Menon, Nuscie Jamil, Nuzhat Shirin, Pamela Philipose, Pratiksba Baxi, Raheema Panhwar, Rashida Dohad, Riffat Aziz, Rita Manchanda, Ritu Menon, Roshmi Goswami, Rozina Junejo, Rukhsana Rashid, Saba Gul Khattak, Safia Noor, Salima Hashmi, Samina Jabbar, Samina Omar Asghar Khan, Shabnam Hashmi, Shad Begum, Sheeba Chhachi, Shahnaz Rouse, Simi Kamal, Smita Gupta, Soonha Abro, Sumaira Ishfaq, Syeda Hamid, Tahira Abdullah, Tasneem Ahmar, Uma Chakravarti, Urvashi Butalia, Uzma Noorani, Vani Subramanian, Vanita Mukherjee.