

Pandits tell US Congress their woes

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Members of Congress have heard a graphic account of ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits, Sikhs and moderate Muslims from Kashmir at the hands of Pakistan-backed Jihadis mostly sent across the Line of Control and some converted to their cause in the Valley.

National Director of the Indo-American Kashmir Forum Jeevan Zutshi said at a conference sponsored by Congressman Frank Pallone, founder and former Co-Chairman of the India Caucus yesterday that in 1990, 300,000 Kashmiri Pandits, Sikhs and moderate Muslims had to flee Kashmir for their lives to neighbouring parts of India.

Since 1989, said Zutshi, Pandits have been forced to live in wretched camps under subhuman conditions lacking even basic amenities. The past 14 years have taken a great toll in these camps in terms of psychological and mental disorders, epidemics and reproductive disorders, resulting in a birth-to-death ratio of 1:4. Killing of over 1,100 Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley, Zutshi said, has been documented. Their ancestral, cultural and spiritual roots are in Kashmir. "They have every right to live in the Valley without fear of persecution and they should not become the forgotten people of Kashmir," he said.

He expressed gratitude to members like Congressman Pallone and others who have promised them that they will not be forgotten. Pakistan, said Zutshi, tried to take the Valley in wars. When that failed, it resorted to terrorism. He charged that Pakistan is churning out 10,000 Jihadis every year from its madrassas to kill infidels. "So long as these schools are not shut down there is very little hope of change," he added. (PTI)