

AID Conference 2004

Minutes for Session Named Peace

Date: 5/31/04

Time From:

To:

Minutes Taken By: Pragya Bhagat

Number of attendees: app. 50

Audio/Visual Component?

Speaker/Panelist Names:

1. Gautam Desai
2. Bob Jensen

What they are speaking about:

Main Presentation:

The session on Peace was held on May 31, 2004 with an audience of approximately 50 conference attendees. Initially, Gautam Desai asked the audience whether we have done activities with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in our community and what we can do to further the peace movement between India and Pakistan. He clarified that sometimes it is out of our control to do the best possible work for Indo-Pak conflicts, because we are better equipped to support grassroot organizations rather than mediate international conflicts.

Gautam discussed his own experiences to give us a perspective on handling Indo-Pak issues. He was at a meeting with anti communal groups that were active in adivasi tribes and in unions. There, he met Jitendra Sahi who talked about People's Pakistan India (PPI) forum. In this forum, the members are all activists, from journalistst and union leaders to NGO activists. He also attended a Fisherman's Forum where they talked about fishermen issues and how Indian and Pakistani counterparts help each other with their respective governments.

He talked about how all people really want is a chance to live their lives. Simple concerns like how to get visas to go across the border were brought up. Trade is necessary, said the Gujrati Muslims he talked to, for all they wanted was a chance to earn their bread.

To further his efforts towards peace, Gautam and others attended a Pakistani Physicians dinner in Florida where they funded \$2,000 to the charity cause. He also interacted with a Bangladeshi ambassador who was more than willing to help AID in efforts toward sustainable development. Furthermore, the ambassador said he'd be the first to sign a South Asian Corpus.

In a meeting for the Coalition for Peace and Justice, Indians and Pakistanis were brought in to talk about how they resolve towards peace and justice as well. A definition of peace containing the need to seek freedom from religious forces, saying no to arms, wanting development not destruction, and asking politicians to build bridges not bombs, was signed by more than 500 mainstream people which led the struggle towards peace to climb ahead.

Another important point that Gautam brought up was that it is usually US interests that create divisions between Pakistanis and Indians. For example, Pakistani activists along with NBA activists shared experiences and stated similar slogans with long chats and similar dances.

Kamala pointed out that the enmity between Indians and Pakistanis is due to the Cold War and US intervention in Pakistan. Hence, development issues throughout South Asia are very similar throughout and it's not hard for us to look up to Pakistani people's movements.

When discussing the peace movement, Bob Jensen's talk focused more on the US antiwar movement as opposed to the Indo-Pak conflict. Under this umbrella, he split up the the post 9/11 movement into the three coalitions. Firstly, the 'win without war' coalition consists of Musicians without War, Artists Without War, etc. The coalition is problematic, because it wishes to continue dominance of the US but in a less intense manner. It uses antiwar energy to elect democrats, and their literature tells a story of US as a departure of US policy from Iraq. Furthermore, it is most visible nationally and most problematic in terms of analysis. Secondly, the 'answer coalition' is a front of the International Action Center which is strongest in San Francisco and New York. They are highly affective in big demonstrations and in exploiting visibility of Nancy Clark, former attorney general of the US. However, it is impossible to work with them in coalition since they have an organizing strategy which makes it hard to build alliances with them as they tend to dominate. Lastly, United for Peace and Justice started after 9-11 tried to tie together grassroots groups. Groups in UFPJ don't just oppose war in Iraq, but oppose the formation of an empire. This project has been going on as long as US could eject power around the world, and believes that economic and military front of US power have to be resisted together. Cold war politics have produced many of the problems around the world.

When asked whether the WTO organizers are part of UFPJ, Bob replied that they went different ways after 9-11.

Bob also emphasized that the Center for Peace and Justice has very little exposure in media. The center is not structured to include those types of ideas and also the movement itself is very weak and in its early stages. Feb 13, day of the big demonstration in 2003 when that failed to stop the war, a lot of people said that the movement is over while it was actually the first step to create an antiwar empire. Also, the size of the groups involved is very small.