

EQUALITY
Struggle for a Classless Society

برابری
ایک غیر طبقاتی سماج کی جدوجہد

Restore Student Unions Now!

طلباء یونینز بحال کرو!

کمپین کا حصہ بننے کیلئے اس نمبر (0333-7513846) پر کال یا ایس ایم کریں۔

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH AND WORKERS MOVEMENT

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IYWM Student Union Campaign Policy Paper

Introduction and Background information:

International Youth And Workers Movement (IYWM) started a campaign for the restoration of student unions in Pakistan in March, 2016. We believe students are the vanguard of change movements in any society. Banning student unions is tantamount to muzzling of future generations' energy, ideas, creativity, passion and dynamism.

Students have played an important role in Pakistan's history and have been instrumental in getting rid of dictators as well as in resisting anti-democratic policies/decisions of the state. And that was perhaps the main reason why they were banned by the dictator Zia Ul Haq in 1984. Even though the ban was lifted in 1989, it was re imposed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 1993 on the grounds of increasing violence on campuses. We believe that it was unfair to blame unions for the violence because the in reality it was due to the state's and political parties' interference in student politics. State favored those groups who supported its policies and suppressed those who opposed them. In fact we think it was part of a larger plan to suppress any dissenting voices and not just discouraging but prohibiting students, working class, and society at large from political activities. Dismantling of trade unions as effective vehicles for workers to stand for their rights was also part of that plan. The ban on student

unions was never lifted by successive, so called democratic, governments in any meaningful sense, having many negative effects on society. It must be clarified that student unions are independent bodies and should be distinguished from student organizations/federations, which are mostly student wings of political parties. While unions were banned, the political wings were continued to operate. In fact certain groups were used to suppress and torture the opposing groups.

This ban has negatively affected students, educational system and society as a whole in Pakistan. In a nut shell:

Students: They lost a platform to demand quality education with decent infrastructure and facilities at affordable price, universally accessible to all citizens and to struggle against policies adversely affecting the education system or the students. Unions provided opportunities for various extra-curricular activities, strengthened democratic values and helped students become well versed in sociopolitical and economical issues of society. Many of them remained active participants in the country's affairs even if not active participants in politics. Lack of unions has depoliticized students leading to their complete dissociation from the affairs of the country.

Education system: Due to lack of resistance from an organized student body, education system has fallen prey to unchecked neoliberal economic policies, giving rise to elite, expensive, money minting private educational institutions which are out of reach of working and middle class, who are forced to attend public institutions where quality of education has been deteriorating consistently. As a result they are unable to compete with upper class in jobs, business, politics and other opportunities and have been permanently relegated to a subordinate role in society, and excluded from all decision making processes.

Society: Student unions served as training grounds for the future leaders in the national political scene. It provided entry point for middle class youth into politics in a system, otherwise, controlled by land owners, industrialists and moneyed class. Elimination of these platforms has robbed the country of the potential talents of these young people. We believe that the purpose of education is not just to produce technocrats and careerists but well rounded socio-politically conscious young men and women who understand the economic, political and social issues and are well versed in current affairs of country as well as the world.

Main criticisms against unions are: a. They lead to violence, b. Distract students from focusing on education and c. Politics is bad and students have no place in it. We believe that the violence is not inherent in the presence of unions; rather it was a result of state policies and negative role of political parties and infiltration of arms in campuses. These concerns can be addressed by setting up some guidelines and rules of conduct for students and political parties. State and administration should assume major responsibility of keeping campuses arms free, promoting a healthy environment where students can exercise their rights. The third narrative, that politics is bad, has been promoted to keep students and the society at large away from politics. This has left the field open and unopposed for those who already control power and politics on the basis of their wealth.

Thus we believe that it is critical to reinstate student unions as neutral, effective, legal platforms where students can exercise their constitutional right to express their opinions and struggle for their rights.

Main components of our Restore Student Unions Now campaign are as follows:

A. Mass awareness:

- a. We have held press conferences in Lahore and Karachi and invited media. Our press conference in Lahore and Karachi attracted good media coverage.
- b. Through posters/stickers/banners in and around educational institutions and public places.
- c. TV programs whenever possible and feasible

B. Involving students: Today students are completely unaware about the importance of student unions. They need to be educated on this issue. We are in the process of setting up campaign committees in various educational institutions as well as at district and provincial level.

Structure of the committee at all levels:

a. Members: There should be preferably 7 members. Anyone can become a member regardless of race, religion, gender, ethnicity or political affiliation as an individual. There will be no group representation. Office bearers will be chosen through consensus or majority vote.

b. Office bearers:

- I. **Chief Coordinator:** Will be overall in charge of the campaign and coordinate all activities, will preside on all meetings.
- II. **Deputy coordinator:** Will assist the chief coordinator in all his functions.

General Secretary: Will be responsible for calling the meeting after the decision is made, keeping minutes and all important and relevant documents.

Information secretary: Will develop alliances with media members, will be responsible for all propaganda about the campaign, and ensure media coverage of all events.

Social media secretary: Will promote the campaign through social media.

Finance secretary: Will be responsible for all financial affairs: Collection and disbursement of funds with committee's approval, keeping detailed records, preparing monthly financial reports, submitting these reports to center.

Code of conduct for all members:

- i. I will always be honest, credible, and dependable.
- ii. I will always be courteous to all people.
- iii. I will respect all religions and never hurt anyone's religious feelings and sensitivity.
- iv. I will never use abusive or foul language.
- v. I will always respect everyone's opinion during discussions and decision making.
- vi. I will never lose temper during discussions regardless of how strongly I feel against the other point of view.
- vii. I will treat each and every member of the campaign with Equal respect and courtesy regardless of their race, religion, gender, ethnicity, or nationality.
- viii. I will be on time for meetings and other events.

- ix. I will never indulge in any criminal activity.
- x. I will openly declare my affiliation or membership with other organizations, if any.

Guidelines for all level committees:

1. All meetings will be conducted in a cordial and orderly manner. All members will be given equal opportunity to express their opinion.
2. Everyone has the right to express their opinion freely without concerns of ridicule or hostile opposition.
3. Decisions will be made by consensus or majority vote.
4. Any strategic decision will have to be approved by the center.
5. Monthly written report will be sent to the center regularly.
6. Finances:
 - a) Budget should be made for all events and sent to the center.
 - b) Try to meet expenses through local fund raising. Any balance will be met by the center for previously approved events.
 - c) Detailed financial report will be prepared by the finance secretary on monthly basis and shared with all committee members and center.
 - d) Funds raised for the campaign will be used for the campaign only.
 - e) All decisions regarding use of funds will be approved by the whole committee by consensus or majority vote.

Guidelines for all public events:

- a. No slogans or banners/posters/pamphlets to be distributed other than those prepared and approved by the center.
- b. All rallies and protests will be peaceful.
- c. All effort will be made to avoid confrontation with authorities.
- d. Center has the right to take disciplinary action against anyone violating these guidelines.
- e. All participants will join in their individual capacity as part of IYWM campaign and not carry their own party or organization's banners or posters etc.

C. Involving past leaders of student unions: We have contacted and interviewed Meraj Mohammad Khan, Dr. Haroon Ahmed, Dr. Mehdi Hasan, Dr. Mubrek Ali and Mr. Hussain Naqi. They have a wealth of information to share and support our campaign.

D. Involving academia: We are contacting people in various universities and colleges who would be supportive of this campaign, Dr. Riaz Shaikh in SZABIST, Dr. Tariq Sohail in Jinnah Medical College, Karachi, Dr. Jafer Ahmad in Karachi University, as well as renowned historian and scholar Dr. Mubarek Ali. All of them have been very supportive.

E. Media and journalists: We recognize the power of media in this age. However media is controlled by forces of status quo so we do realize that it will be very few who will be willing to actively get involved or support this campaign. We will try to reach out to the progressive elements in the media. We will have a robust campaign through social media

F. Develop international alliances wherever possible.

G. Start on line petition.

H. Take Legal Action: We have done some research on this issue. The ban on student unions was initially imposed by the dictator Ziaul Haq, was lifted in 1989 but reimposed by the Supreme Court in 1993 as we mentioned in the beginning. Thus the issue will have to be challenged in Supreme Court.

In the end, we propose the following recommendations as guidelines for student unions. We hope that this will serve as a starting point for further discussion on this topic:

Recommandations:

1. Conduct elections in all universities across the country
2. The entire election process should be limited to 2 weeks.
3. Elections to be held annually after the start of new academic year.
4. A code of conduct should be devised and applicable to all parties involved
5. Only regular students enrolled in the institution will be eligible to participate in the election process and they should have been enrolled at least for a period of one year.

6. No one from outside the institution to be allowed to participate in student union elections or activities.
7. Minimum requirements should be set up for candidates to ensure academic competency.
8. There should be appropriate age limit for candidates to avoid those who want to remain on campuses just for political activities.
9. Proper guideline on how to conduct elections should be set up and maintained. For example use of loud speakers, printed materials, meetings and rallies, speeches and canvassing, use of vehicles etc.
10. Political parties or any outside group will not be allowed to directly or indirectly influence the election and functions of the unions. This includes state agencies, institutional administration, religious groups etc.
11. There should be guidelines for the financial aspect of the election process. For example, expenses for any candidate not to exceed certain limit, no outside funding to be allowed, complete financial transparency to be mandatory etc.
12. There should be no discriminations based on ethnicity, race, caste, gender, religion or nationality etc.
13. Places of worship not to be used for campaign propaganda.
14. All educational institutions should be declared arms free zones. There should be severe punishments for violators.
15. A proper mechanism to be set up to address any grievances or conflicts.
16. A mechanism should be set up to regularly review the process of elections and student union activities to ensure compliance with agreed upon rules and policies and point out any weaknesses in the system. This should involve student representatives.

How can you help?

This campaign needs your support. Like everything else in life, certain material resources are required. It is your opportunity to make a positive difference in what is happening in Pakistan today. **You can help by:**

1. Financial support: Any amount of donation is welcome to promote this constitutional right of students. You can do this on line through our website, www.iywm.org, or mail a check to our office or deposit it directly into our bank account. **Kindly call, Mr. Tariq Shahzad (0324-451-4622)** for further details.
2. Help us get connected to others who may be positively interested in this issue and willing to help. This is especially important for members of electronic and print media.
3. If you know of any student organizations in Pakistan or anywhere in the world, please help us connect with them. We believe they can be of tremendous source of moral support.

November 1, 2016