

Statement of Consensus

THE CONFERENCE ON Minorities, Education and Language in Twenty-First Century Indian Democracy—the Case of Urdu with Special Reference to Dr. Zakir Husain, Late President of India, after due deliberation, arrived at the following consensus:

1. Since all Schedule 8 languages, including Hindi, have a minority status outside the states where they are the principal languages of the state and since practically every state and district is increasingly multilingual, given the increasing social mobility in the country, there is a clear need for evolving a uniform national policy on minority languages at various levels in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Constitution.
2. Urdu (along with Sindhi) is unique in that while it is spoken all over the country, it is not the language of the majority in any state. But while Urdu demands special attention at the national level, at the state level the problems it faces are the same as those faced by other minority languages and can be resolved only within the framework of a uniform national policy accepted by all states, which should crystallize into a national code for linguistic minorities.
3. In this context, several languages which are claimed as a mother tongue by millions of people in the Hindi region and which are striving to come into their own but have so far remained submerged, should be recognized, placed in Schedule 8 and given due place in the educational system.
4. Evaluation of public policies and monitoring the status of Urdu, including an assessment of the facilities available for instruction through Urdu and the teaching of Urdu from the primary to the senior secondary level, should be a continuous exercise for the development of a suitable strategy for finding Urdu its due place in the curriculum of secular education.
5. The educational backwardness of any region or community can only be remedied by maximizing its access to modern education which is, in the Indian context, almost wholly, the responsibility of the state. The state

governments should provide due place and adequate facilities within the educational system to every language that is claimed to be the language of inhabitants of any region of India.

6. In particular, Urdu must be included in the school curriculum at the primary level as the medium of instruction in all government and government-aided schools and in the schools affiliated to the recognized Boards of Education, for those who declare Urdu as their mother tongue.

To promote universalization of elementary education, Urdu-medium primary schools must be opened in Urdu-concentration localities in both rural and urban areas in accordance with the national norm of one school for every 300 Urdu-speaking families. Children from scattered Urdu-speaking families should be horizontally aggregated in Urdu-medium primary schools within a reasonable distance.

The regional or principal language of the state should be introduced in Urdu-medium schools from Standard III.

While the common medium of secondary education from Standard VI onwards should be the regional language or the principal language of the state, Urdu must be taught to Urdu-speaking children, from Standard VI to X under the Three-Language Formula, as a compulsory first language, along with Hindi or the principal language of the state as compulsory second language. But Urdu may also be included as an optional second language for non-Urdu students from class VI.

Also in non-Hindi states, Urdu as first language should have an alternative Urdu-Hindi composite course.

The secondary students should have the option of learning English or a classical language as third language.

The Conference recognizes the role of Sanskrit as a rich heritage of India, but it should not displace any mother tongue from primacy in the educational framework.

7. Funding of religious instruction at the expense of the public exchequer is undesirable and unconstitutional. Hence, the *madrassa* system, which serves the limited purposes of instructing Muslim children in the basic tenets of Islam, producing religious functionaries needed by the community, and maintaining the continuity of religious scholarship, should be left entirely to the community to evolve in accordance with demand. In any case, the *madrassa* system contributes only marginally to the development of education among Muslims.
8. The age limit for compulsory elementary education should be raised from 14 to 15 years, which is the minimum age limit for appearing at the secondary examination.

The recent Constitutional amendment making education a fundamental right should be supplemented by a statutory provision covering the medium of primary instruction, educational uniformity, national norms for the establishment of primary and secondary schools and the location of schools on demand.

Also, Article 350-A, pertaining to primary instruction through the mother tongue, should be amended to make it mandatory.

The term “substantial population” in Article 347 on special provisions for a linguistic minority of a state should be clarified by an explanation that “substantial” means “not negligible” and, in any case, due facilities should be provided at every administrative level for any language spoken by at least 5 percent of the population at that level.

The Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities (CLM), despite his status as a Constitutional authority, enjoys no authority and state governments do not even supply the required information to him. The reports of the CLM, though tabled in the Parliament, are not discussed and do not receive attention as they hardly contain up-to-date information. The Conference proposes that the post be abolished and replaced by a National Commission for Linguistic Minorities with quasi-judicial authority.

9. The survival of democracy in a plural society indeed lies in the survival of minority languages and cultures. Urdu is par excellence a symbol of our composite culture and a vehicle of secular values and deserves special attention.

In order to protect Urdu from extinction in its land of birth, while it flourishes abroad, a national movement for the revival of Urdu commanding strong political will is the need of the hour. Such a movement should struggle for the educational and cultural rights of all linguistic and cultural minorities in all states of the country and for the elaboration and implementation of the national code as mentioned above.

The Conference appeals to the people, irrespective of political affiliation and linguistic loyalties, to extend their support to this movement. □

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