

# Pakistan India Relaxed Visa Policy



**Final Report  
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## **Final Report**

### **Pakistan India Relaxed Visa Policy**

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## Executive Summary

CPSS is a pioneer non-governmental organization working on Counter violent extremism (CVE), youth de-radicalization and peace. The project “Pak-India Relaxed Visa Regime” was a 1 year project from September 2011 to Oct 2012 supported by British High Commission, Islamabad.

Purpose of the project was to make a constituency of political leaders, journalists, and business community, divided family, convincing youth and students to sign on the petition and further convincing enough number of them to actively engage as members of the Relaxed Visa Forum. Moreover, engaging people in dialogue and debate at policy level, academic institutions and public spaces on relax visa policy.

In order to achieve the envisaged objectives CPSS organized constituencies of business community, political leaders, journalists, peace activists, business community and youth. Moreover, essay and posters competition on “Benefits of a relaxed visa regime” and “Paving the way for a relaxed Pakistan-India Visa Policy” organized for students of age 18 or less.

In the end the project achieved its envisaged objectives successfully by reaching a significant section of ordinary citizens, youth, members of the select constituency with a message of a Relaxed Visa Regime, convincing 110,000 of them to sign on the petition and further convincing a number of them to actively engage as members of the Relaxed Visa Forum. Overall, CPSS became successful in engaging people in dialogue, changing minds and sparking debate from the bus terminals, markets and the academic institutions on relaxed Pak-India visa.

## Background

CPSS is a community-based organization working on peace, extremism and youth de-radicalization since 1995. Time and again CPSS has been taking initiatives to engage youth in peace activities. Some of the major projects organized by CPSS since 2005 are as follow:

In 2005 CPSS organized Asha Pariwar and National Alliance for People's Movement in India co-organized "Peace March" from Delhi to Multan. Youth Convention for "Visa Free and Peaceful South Asia" in 2006, organized by CPSS - where students presented papers, sang peace songs, performed a skit, had group discussions and passed a resolution for a future plan of action. In same year CPSS hosted a 2 day "Visa free and Nuclear Free South Asia" conventions in Delhi and Lahore. Moreover, In 2006 CPSS Co-hosted a daylong seminar on "Visa Free Regime between Pakistan & India" with The Indo-Pak Soldiers Initiative for Peace. The Indian delegation included a retired Brigadier & General, accompanied by a member of Indian Parliament, academics, peace activists and artists.

In 2009 CPSS took 50 Pakistani students to 5-day International Peace Festival "International Youth Peace Festival" in Chandigarh, India. In same year 1 day Youth Convention "Role of Youth in Pakistan's Current Situation" was organized - which engaged 200-300 youth for a daylong session, which included a serious discussion, music, theatre and breakout sessions. Moreover, CPSS arranged and hosted a delegation of Indian dignitaries (University VCs, Bollywood producers, Journalists, Parliamentarians and Activists) at Lahore in 2011.

## Project Purpose

The major purpose of the project is to "Create a shared constituency for peace among various segments of society of both Pakistan and India by highlighting and publicizing concrete benefits of relaxing the visa regime.

## Project Activities

### 1. Signature Campaigns:

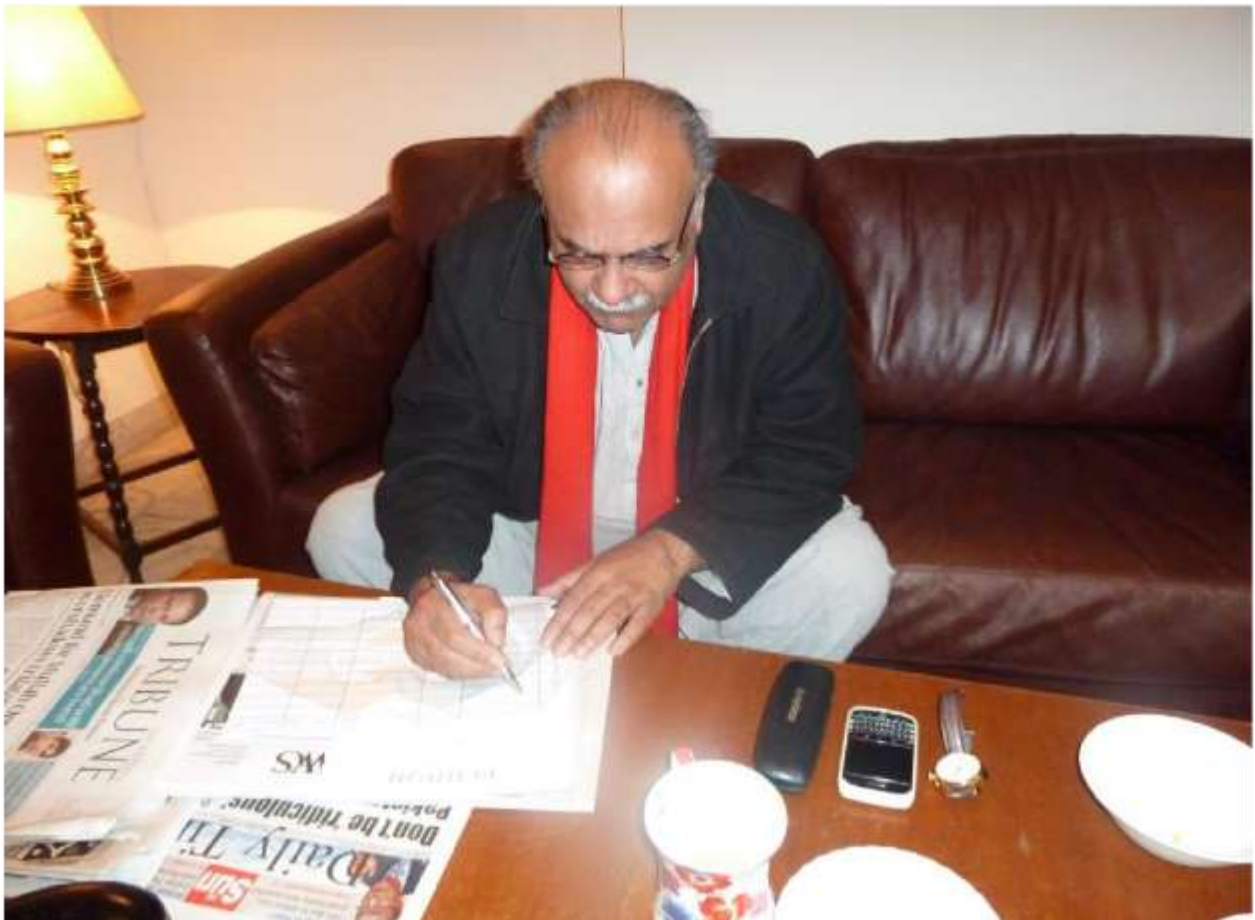
CPSS held signature campaign in 5 Cities of Punjab (Lahore, Multan, Pak-Pattan, Faisalabad, Okara). About 1 million people were reached through this campaign and one hundred thousand people agreed to sign the campaign. Campaign stalls were installed in educational institutes, shopping malls, bus stations, and religious institutes. Volunteer teams were placed in these places to communicate the message of the campaign to people in order to convince them to sign the petition.



# Pakistan- India Relaxed Visa Regime



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## 2. Conference to honor peace activists

A Conference was held in Lahore press club to honor the lifelong contributions of Mr. Kuldeep Nayar and Mr. Mubashar Hassan towards Indo-Pak peace. Honorable guests included legends like Kuldeep Nayar, Mubashar Hassan, IA Rahman, Mahesh Bhatt, Madeeha Gauhar, and journalists, peace activists, and members of civil society. Awards were presented to Mr. Kuldeep Nayar and Mr. Mubashar Hassan.



# Pakistan - India Relaxed Visa Regime



## 3. 2 Day Visa Free Convention

A Convention was held in PILAAC in which Dr. Khalid Zaheer was invited as a guest speaker to discuss the necessity of peace between India and Pakistan. A talk which illuminated the religious, ethical, and rational reasons for peaceful coexistence and evasion of conflict was attended by students, teachers, civil society members, and journalists. Another session focus on people to people contact between the two countries; testimonies of Pakistani citizens were shared who had the privilege of interacting with the Indian people.

Theatre and dance performances were also a part of the convention to communicate the message of peace by various mediums. Later, participants were awarded certificates as a token of appreciation for their hard work.



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## 4. Convention on Signatories for Peace

Another convention was held in PC Hotel Lahore on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2012 to discuss a nuclear free south Asia and a relaxed visa regime. Honorable guests included Sandeep Pandey, Raza Rumi, Mehdi Hassan.



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## 5. Project Documentary

A documentary film was made regarding all the proceedings of Relaxed Visa Policy campaign.

## 6. Relaxed Visa Campaign on Peace on Wheels

CPSS pioneered the use of Rickshaws for propagating peace messages all across the city of Lahore. Relaxed Visa Regime's message of reconciliation and peace with neighbors was also spread using Rickshaw. Flexes were attached behind rickshaws which kept them on for at least a year.

# Pakistan- India Relaxed Visa Regime



# Pakistan- India Relaxed Visa Regime



## 7. Essay and Poster Competition

An Essay and poster on "Benefits of a relaxed visa regime between Pakistan and



India” for students having the age of 18 or less was organized from Nov 20, 2011 – January 5, 2012. Aims of the activity were to; gain access to the various schools (public & private) to involve the student body in the campaign and incentivize them to write about benefits of a relaxed visa regime thus influencing their thinking.

CPSS also ran an advertisement campaign on Facebook and its website in order to involve as many institutions as possible in both competitions. Around 512 schools and colleges were invited to this competition. We received 184 Essays in English and Urdu languages. After passing through a process of checking and reviewing by experts, three essays from English and three from Urdu were qualified as best.

Poster competition was organized on “Paving the way for a relaxed Pakistan-India Visa Policy”. The competition dates were Nov 20, 2011 – January 5, 2012. We received 25 posters, both in electronic and hard form which were assessed by a panel of judges. Accordingly, three posters were selected as top three. Few of the posters have been selected to be used in the next publicity campaign.

As it was decided earlier that top three winners would be selected from each category. The Prizes were won by the following students:

#### English Essay

1. 1st - Minahil Najeeb, Bahria Town, Lahore
2. 2nd - Syed Muhammad Arham, Loral Bank Public School
3. 3rd - Muhammad Daniyal-10-C, Crescent Model School

#### Urdu Essay

1. Yusra Minahil Nasir, Beacon house School System
2. Asma Ashraf, Quaid-e-Azam College for Accountancy and Commerce
3. Umer Zafar, Crescent Model Higher Secondary School

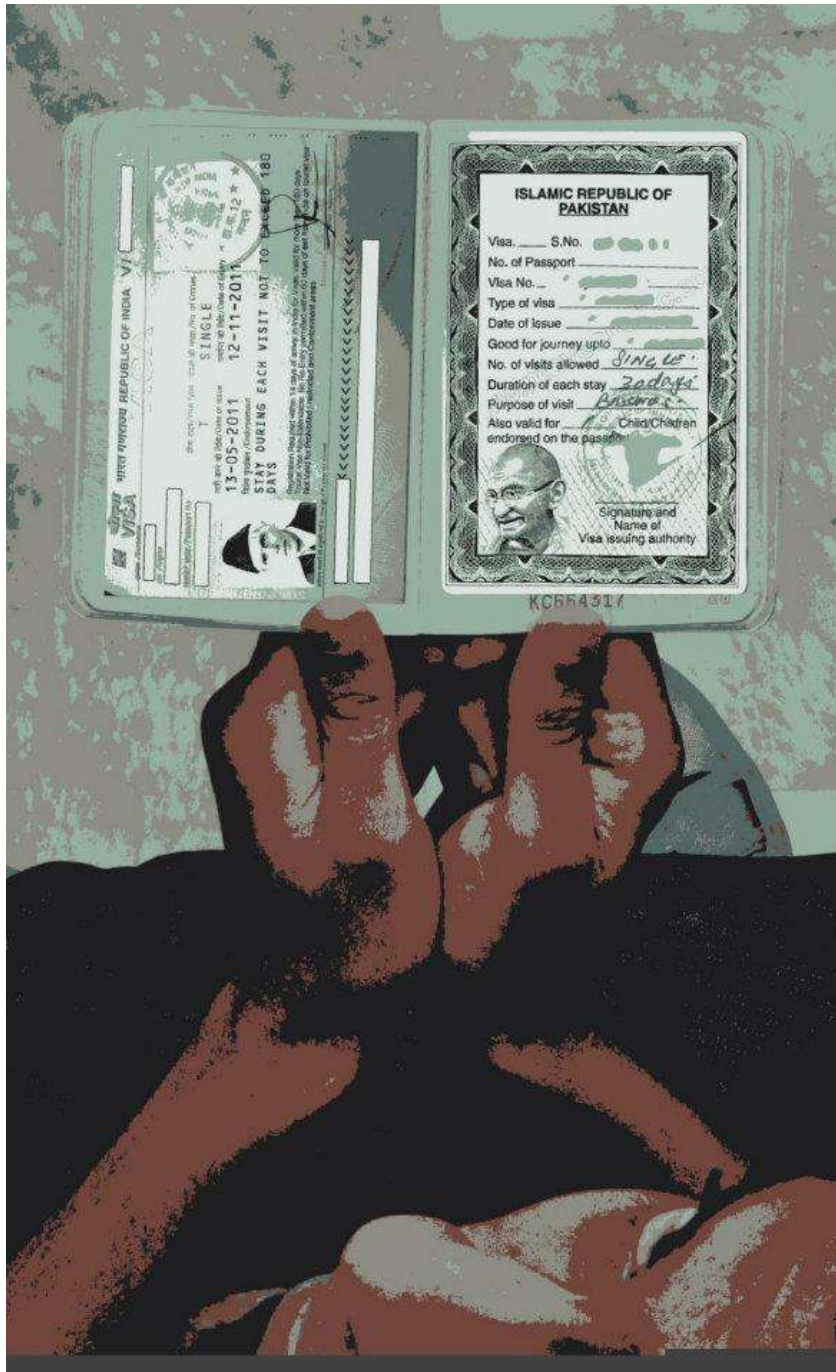
#### Poster Competition

1st Prize: Tamur Asghar (BNU)

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2nd Prize: Ahmed Junaid Nizami (BNU)  
3rd Prize: Amal Shahrukh & Komal Tariq (BNU)



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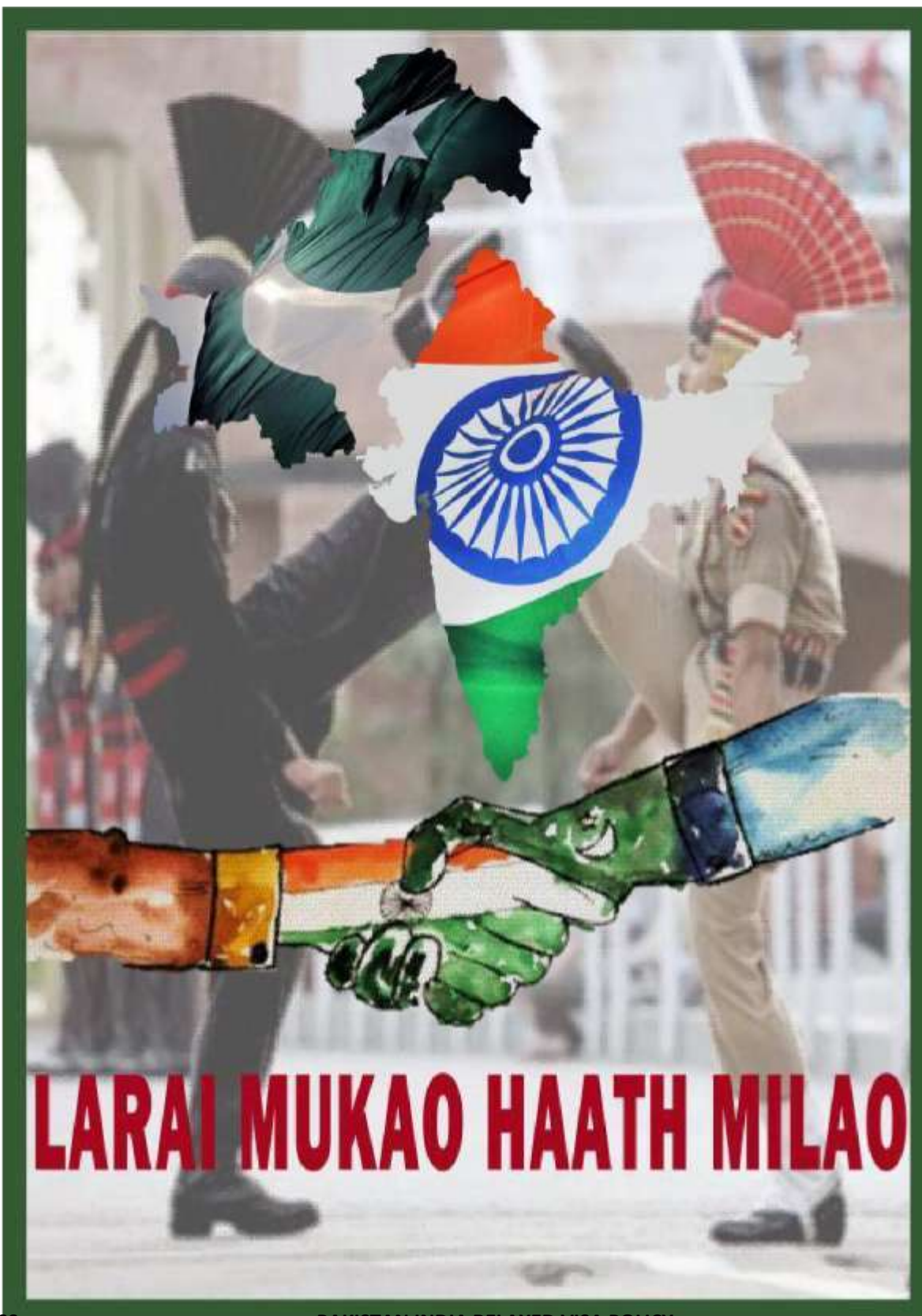
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## 8. Peace March from Multan to Delhi

A peace march was held from Multan to Delhi, by citizens of India and Pakistan, to send a message of friendship, goodwill and peace to each other as well as to lobby to their respective governments to pursue friendly relations with neighbors and relax the strict and redundant visa conditions for Indian and Pakistani citizens. Celebrities like Mahesh Bhatt from India, and actress Meera from Pakistan participated in this march.





## Monitoring and Evaluation

CPSS Board of Directors work on a pro-bono basis except the Chairperson of the organization. Monitoring team comprised of three members of the Board - who monitored the progress of the project on a monthly basis. The Chairperson of CPSS and the project team presented monthly progress report inclusive of project activities and finances to the Board of Monitoring Committee. CPSS provided quarterly narrative and financial reports to the donor as well as final completion report at the end of the project.

## Envisaged Output:

1. 110,000 signatures of Pakistani citizens on the Relaxed Visa Regime Petition & its delivery to the Pakistani Prime Minister.
2. 5 seminars held on benefits of a Relaxed Visa Regime for a specific sector e.g. Trade, Humanitarian, etc.
3. Wrote 10 news items / articles on Relaxed or Visa Free Regime in print media.
4. Made a documentary Film highlighting issues related to & benefits of a Relaxed Visa Regime.
5. Re-activating, reconnecting and building a broad based Relaxed Visa Regime constituency in Pakistan. Creating a forum as a representative body of this constituency.
6. Established Pak-India Relaxed Visa Regime forum in Pakistan and India.

## Sustainability

The project aims to build a constituency for peace in both countries Pakistan and India - which extends its coordination and activities beyond the 1-year project. The project thus ensured inclusion and active participation of communities who have a material interest in people to people contact. Inducted and engaged new members during the Relaxed Visa Regime signature campaign to strengthen the constituency.

Moreover, to ensure sustainability, a forum representing the Relaxed Visa Regime constituency was developed over the year. Forum's secretariat will be based in IPSS and will be responsible for contact management, organizing regular meetings, and producing an email based quarterly newsletter highlighting relevant issues on the Pakistan-India visa front. Regular contacts and activities throughout the project year will ensure building trust and momentum through transparency and inclusiveness with the goal that the forum representing this constituency continues on a self-help basis beyond the 1-year project timeframe.

## Lesson Learnt

Based on our previous work in regards to Pakistan-India peace, we have concluded that it is more important to project the message to maximum number of people rather than be limited to peace activists. Thus media campaign and publicity is an important component of this project as delegates will include dignitaries and celebrities from both countries.

Additionally, it is also important that communities with material interests are linked to the campaign. Thus business communities and entertainment people from both sides will be an important part of the campaign.

## Annexure:

### **Resolution for the Pakistan-India Relaxed Visa Regime**

For too long now, Pakistan and India have lived in a culture of animosity at the expense of the betterment of their people. For too long now, our doors have been closed through a strict visa regime strengthening the very forces that do not want peace in this region. For too long now, SAARC has been ineffectual and trade among us negligible keeping shut the window of regional prosperity. For too long now, our peoples who share a history, cultural heritage, traditions and language are forcefully separated. For too long now we have stayed prisoner to the baggage of partition and to the zero sum game of cold war politics.

The long standing issues between Pakistan and India cannot be solved overnight. Similarly, the culture of hostility propagated by the various forces will not disappear overnight. But if there is a mutual understanding that ultimately both peoples want peace in the region, then the debate whether Pakistan and India can start interacting as normal neighbors, have people to people interaction and conduct mutually beneficial activities becomes misplaced because the various misperceptions and mistrust between them cannot be resolved without the two peoples coming together. We believe that only a relaxed visa regime between the two countries which allows both peoples to interact, converse, debate and disagree while understanding the position of the other can break down mutual hostility and lead to the resolution of long standing and arising conflicts. Multitudes of voices across both countries including parliamentarians, religious pilgrims, divided families, traders, farmers, aid workers, students & others have long been advocating a relaxed visa regime for the benefit of our people.

The benefits of a relaxed visa regime are multitude in nature. For families divided by the border, it is a human right to meet loved ones on a regular basis which all other families take for granted. For students, it is the opportunity to interact with fellow youth, attend academic conferences, buy relevant books and receive guidance from knowledgeable professors. For journalists, it allows for more objective reporting and raise pertinent policy issues impacting both countries. For parliamentarians especially the Punjab, it would help understand the other's position while allowing for better management of shared issues

such as Climate Change. For traders and business community, it means exploring market opportunities to provide better products to their domestic consumer. Thus overall, a relaxed visa regime is beneficial for the people of both countries while it is our humble submission that the risks posed by terrorists in the garb of ordinary citizen traveler do not have a historical basis and are overblown.

We thus believe that it is the need of the hour that the governments of both India and Pakistan take active, concrete measures to remove the hurdles separating the people of both nations by relaxing the visa regime. The current visa regime is unnecessarily severe and serves no purpose other than to fuel hatred and mistrust of the neighbor. We propose the liberalization of the visa regime in phases:

1. A Trusted Visa category (without location & police restrictions) for trusted visitors' on both sides is instituted. This should include categories such as senior citizens, divided families, peace activists, business persons, accredited journalists, cultural and sports personalities, and others as you may see fit.
2. Visa process should be expedited for professional delegations (including university students) invited by organizers from across the border.
3. There should be no city restriction on the visa granted. The grantee should be free to travel within the country once across the border.
4. Visa upon arrival should be made available for the citizens of India and Pakistan when they travel to each other's countries. This option already exists within SAARC countries like Nepal where no visa fee is charged for SAARC member states.

We are hopeful and confident that through the participation of the citizens in this campaign, our leaders may understand the critical need for a popular constituency for peace and friendship for CBMs (confidence building measures) and an uninterrupted dialogue between the two countries, which is not possible without the liberalization of the visa regime. We dream of a South Asia modeled along the lines of the European Union where nation-states do not cease to be autonomous units. But while maintaining their independence and a separate identity, form a union of nations that work for the collective well-being of the region.

## PETITION to relax Pakistan-India visa policy

To the Honorable Prime Minister of Pakistan

We, the undersigned, being citizens of Pakistan, firmly believe that Pakistan and India are neighboring nations and should live as friendly neighbors and not as enemies.

We vouch that initiatives of peace between the two nations are essential especially keeping in view that both countries have lived under the shadow of war for long and realize that the threat of war has undermined the overall potential of the region and its people, hampering initiatives for poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

In a world where coexistence, engagement, cooperation and mutual dialogue between neighboring nations are the norm, we believe that the deficit of mutual trust and conflict can be minimized through greater confidence building measures which can play a positive role in resolving our long outstanding issues as well as addressing the upcoming future issues cordially.

Therefore, through this petition, we advocate easing of Pakistan-India visa policy and desire to see concrete steps taken in this direction that can pave the way for continued peace and harmony in the region through greater trade, tourism, collaboration in education and healthcare sectors and renewed people to people contact.



An initiative by IPSS

Visit us: [relaxedvisa.org](http://relaxedvisa.org)