



CONFERENCE REPORT ON

IRCRA–PPAF Regional Dialogue Conference State–Society Dialogue, Peace, and Social Cohesion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Governor House, Peshawar, KPK



International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA)

Unit 14, Block 1-D, Quaid-e-Azam Avenue, Rehman Plaza, D-Chowk, Blue Area, Islamabad

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1) Executive Summary

The **IRCRA–PPAF Regional Dialogue Conference on State–Society Dialogue, Peace, and Social Cohesion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** was convened as a high-level, multi-stakeholder platform to address one of the most pressing governance and societal challenges in Pakistan: the disconnect between state institutions and the communities they serve.

Held at the prestigious **Governor House, Peshawar**, the conference brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including senior government officials, parliamentarians, religious scholars, security experts, development practitioners, academia, civil society representatives, youth leaders, and media professionals. The presence and leadership of the **Honourable Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi**, as Chief Guest and chair of the concluding session, underscored the strategic importance of the dialogue.



The conference was organized by the **International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA)** in collaboration with its funding partner, the **Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF)**, both of which have a long-standing commitment to fostering inclusive dialogue, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting sustainable peace through community engagement and policy advocacy.

At its core, the conference aimed to:

- Facilitate meaningful engagement between **state institutions and society**
- Explore the role of youth, religious leadership, and development actors in peacebuilding

- Identify pathways for inclusive governance and participatory policymaking
- Develop consensus on **practical, scalable solutions** for strengthening social cohesion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Newly Merged Districts

A defining feature of the conference was its **two-tiered panel structure**:

- A **Youth Panel**, focusing on education, civic engagement, and youth-led peacebuilding
- A **High-Level Multi-Stakeholder Panel**, addressing governance, security, religion, and development

The discussions were rich, forward-looking, and solution-oriented. A strong consensus emerged around the need to **institutionalize state–society dialogue**, empower youth as active contributors to national development, and ensure that governance frameworks are inclusive, transparent, and responsive.

The conference concluded with a reaffirmation that **sustainable peace cannot be achieved through isolated interventions**, but requires a **coordinated, inclusive, and dialogue-driven approach** that integrates state policies with community realities.

2) Background and Context

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly the Newly Merged Districts, occupies a critical position in Pakistan’s socio-political and security landscape. Over the past two decades, the region has undergone significant transformation, shaped by conflict, counter-terrorism operations, governance transitions, and evolving geopolitical dynamics.

Despite notable progress in restoring stability, several structural and societal challenges persist:

2.1 Governance Transitions and Institutional Gaps

The merger of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa marked a historic shift toward mainstream governance. However, this transition has also exposed:

- Capacity gaps in administrative structures
- Limited service delivery mechanisms
- Weak local governance systems

These challenges have contributed to a **perceived disconnect between citizens and state institutions**, particularly in remote and underserved areas.

2.2 Social Fragmentation and Trust Deficit

Years of conflict and marginalization have led to:

- Erosion of public trust in institutions
- Weakening of traditional social structures
- Fragmentation within communities

This has created an environment where **misinformation, polarization, and mistrust** can easily take root, undermining efforts toward peace and cohesion.

2.3 Youth Bulge and Socio-Economic Pressures

The region has a rapidly growing youth population, which presents both an opportunity and a challenge:

- Youth represent a powerful force for innovation, peacebuilding, and development
- However, lack of employment opportunities, limited access to quality education, and insufficient civic engagement platforms increase vulnerability to:
 - Radical narratives
 - Social disillusionment

- Political disengagement

2.4 Role of Religion and Community Leadership

Religious leaders and local community structures, including jirgas, continue to play a central role in shaping societal attitudes. Their influence can:

- Promote **peace, tolerance, and cohesion**
- Or, if misused, contribute to **division and ideological polarization**

Engaging these actors constructively is therefore essential for sustainable peace.

2.5 Emerging Geopolitical and Digital Challenges

The broader geopolitical environment, combined with the rapid expansion of digital platforms, has introduced new complexities:

- Spread of **misinformation and propaganda through social media**
- External influences shaping local narratives
- Increased polarization within communities

These dynamics reinforce the urgent need for **credible dialogue platforms and responsible communication strategies**.

2.6 Rationale for the Conference

In light of these challenges, the conference was convened as a **strategic intervention** to:

- Rebuild **trust between state and society**
- Create a platform for **inclusive, multi-stakeholder dialogue**
- Amplify the voices of **youth and marginalized communities**
- Integrate perspectives from **security, governance, religion, and development sectors**
- Generate actionable recommendations for **policymakers and practitioners**

The conference recognized that **peace and social cohesion cannot be imposed—they must be co-created through dialogue, participation, and mutual understanding**.

3) Objectives of the Conference

The conference was guided by a set of clearly defined objectives, designed to ensure both **immediate impact and long-term relevance**.

3.1 Strengthening State–Society Dialogue

A primary objective was to promote structured engagement between:

- Government institutions
- Community stakeholders
- Civil society actors

This included identifying ways to move beyond **ad-hoc consultations** toward **institutionalized dialogue mechanisms**.

3.2 Promoting Inclusive Governance

The conference sought to emphasize the importance of governance models that are:

- Participatory
- Transparent
- Responsive to local needs

Special attention was given to ensuring that **marginalized voices**, particularly from tribal areas, are included in decision-making processes.

3.3 Empowering Youth as Agents of Change

Recognizing the central role of youth, the conference aimed to:

- Provide a platform for **youth voices and perspectives**
- Encourage youth participation in **policy and community initiatives**
- Promote youth-led approaches to **peacebuilding and social cohesion**

3.4 Engaging Religious and Community Leadership

The conference highlighted the need to:

- Strengthen the role of religious leaders in promoting **unity and tolerance**
- Encourage collaboration between **religious institutions and state actors**
- Counter extremist narratives through **responsible religious discourse**

3.5 Integrating Development and Peacebuilding

Another key objective was to explore how development initiatives can:

- Address **root causes of conflict**, such as poverty and exclusion
- Strengthen **community resilience**
- Support long-term **social stability**

3.6 Generating Policy-Relevant Recommendations

The conference aimed to produce:

- Practical, evidence-based recommendations
- Insights that can inform **provincial and national policy frameworks**
- Strategies that are both **scalable and context-specific**

4) Participation and Stakeholder Engagement

One of the defining strengths of the conference was its **diverse and inclusive participation**, ensuring representation from multiple sectors and perspectives.

4.1 Government and Political Leadership

The participation of senior government officials and political representatives ensured that:

- Discussions were aligned with **policy priorities**
- Recommendations had potential for **institutional uptake**

4.2 Security and Strategic Experts

Security analysts and experts contributed critical insights into:

- Regional stability
- Counter-extremism strategies
- Civil-military coordination

4.3 Religious Scholars and Community Leaders

Religious leadership played a key role in:

- Framing discussions around ethical responsibility and social harmony
- Promoting narratives of peace, tolerance, and coexistence

4.4 Development Sector Representatives

Organizations such as PPAF brought perspectives on:

- Poverty alleviation
- Community-driven development
- Grassroots engagement

4.5 Youth and Civil Society

The active inclusion of youth leaders, student representatives, and civil society actors ensured that:

- Discussions remained grounded in community realities
- Emerging voices were given meaningful space and recognition

4.6 Media and Communication Stakeholders

Media professionals contributed to:

- Shaping public discourse
- Amplifying key messages
- Highlighting the importance of **responsible information dissemination**

5) Opening Segment and Pre-Panel Sessions

The sessions preceding the panel discussions were carefully structured to **set the intellectual, thematic, and strategic foundation** for the entire conference. These initial segments played a critical role in aligning participants around shared objectives, contextualizing the challenges, and framing the direction of subsequent discussions.

5.1 Registration, Reception, and Informal Networking

The conference commenced with a structured registration and reception phase, which provided participants with an opportunity to engage in **informal networking and preliminary exchanges**.

This segment, while often procedural in nature, played an important role in:

- Facilitating **cross-sector interaction** among participants
- Allowing stakeholders from diverse backgrounds—government, civil society, academia, youth, and media—to initiate dialogue
- Creating an environment conducive to **open and collaborative engagement**

Participants from different regions, including representatives from the Newly Merged Districts, tribal youth, and civil society organizations, were able to connect and share perspectives even before formal proceedings began. This helped establish a **participatory and inclusive atmosphere** that carried forward into the main sessions.



*IRCRA–PPAF Regional Dialogue Conference
State–Society Dialogue, Peace, and Social Cohesion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

No.	Registration No.	Name	Gender	Religion	Education	Address	Phone	Signature
1	0301101204	Muhammad Saif	Male	Koroshi	BA Islamic Studies	0301101204		
2	0301091377	Muhammad Ali	Male	Azadi	F.Sc.	0301091377		
3	0301042012	Sahar Zameer	F	ISB	B.Sc. Hons	0301042012		
4	0301020542	Muhammad	M	Moham	BA Islamic Studies	0301020542		
5	0301030491	Zameer Zameer	F	RUP	M.Sc.	0301030491		
6	0301210906	Ahmed Ahsan	F	RUP	BA	0301210906		
7	0301030491	Zameer Zameer	F	RUP	M.Sc.	0301030491		
8	0301030491	Zameer Zameer	F	RUP	M.Sc.	0301030491		
9	0301030491	Zameer Zameer	F	RUP	M.Sc.	0301030491		
10	0301030491	Zameer Zameer	F	RUP	M.Sc.	0301030491		

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5.2 Opening Session

The Opening Session marked the formal commencement of the conference and was designed to establish a **shared vision, tone, and direction** for the day's proceedings.

The session began with:

- **Recitation from the Holy Qur'an**, reflecting the cultural and ethical grounding of the dialogue
- The **National Anthem**, reinforcing a sense of collective identity and national unity

This was followed by the **Welcome Address and Introductory Remarks**, delivered by:

- **Mr. Muhammad Israr (President, IRCRA)**
- **Mr. Ahmed Kundi (Parliamentary Leader, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly)**





5.2.1 Key Themes from Welcome Address

The opening remarks emphasized the importance of **dialogue as a cornerstone of governance and peacebuilding**, particularly in regions experiencing social and political transition.

Mr. Muhammad Israr highlighted:

- The vision of IRCRA in promoting **inclusive dialogue platforms**
- The importance of engaging **diverse stakeholders across sectors**
- The need to bridge the gap between **policy frameworks and community realities**

He underscored that sustainable peace requires:

- Continuous engagement rather than one-time interventions
- Building trust through **transparent and participatory processes**
- Recognizing communities as **partners in governance, not passive recipients**



5.2.2 Political and Governance Perspective

Mr. Ahmed Kundi, representing the provincial legislative leadership, emphasized:

- The importance of strengthening democratic institutions
- The role of parliamentarians in ensuring that citizen voices are reflected in policymaking
- The need for constructive engagement between elected representatives and communities

He highlighted that:

- Governance systems must evolve to become more **inclusive, responsive, and accountable**
- Dialogue platforms such as this conference are essential in fostering **mutual understanding and trust**



5.2.3 Strategic Significance of Opening Session

Collectively, the opening session achieved several important outcomes:

- Established a collaborative and forward-looking tone
- Reinforced the importance of state–society engagement
- Positioned the conference as a policy-relevant and action-oriented platform

It also made clear that the discussions would not remain theoretical, but would aim to produce **practical insights and actionable recommendations**.

5.3 Opening Remarks and Conceptual Framing

Following the opening session, the conference transitioned into a dedicated segment for **conceptual framing and analytical reflection**, delivered by:

- **Dr. Aamer Raza (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar)**



5.3.1 Analytical Perspective on State–Society Relations

Dr. Aamer Raza provided a comprehensive overview of the evolving dynamics of **state–society relations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**, particularly in the context of the Newly Merged Districts.

He emphasized that:

- The relationship between the state and society is **dynamic and context-dependent**
- Periods of transition often expose **institutional gaps and societal tensions**
- Addressing these challenges requires **intentional and structured engagement**

5.3.2 Importance of Dialogue in Transitional Contexts

A key focus of the remarks was the role of dialogue in regions undergoing transformation. Dr. Raza highlighted that:

- Dialogue serves as a mechanism to:
 - Build mutual understanding

- Address grievances
 - Prevent escalation of conflicts
- In the absence of dialogue:
 - Misperceptions and mistrust tend to increase
 - Social fragmentation becomes more pronounced

He stressed that **dialogue must be institutionalized rather than episodic**, ensuring continuity and sustainability.

5.3.3 Role of Academia in Policy and Society

Dr. Raza also underscored the role of academia in:

- Producing **evidence-based insights**
- Informing public policy
- Facilitating **critical and informed discourse**

He emphasized that collaboration between academia, policymakers, and civil society is essential for:

- Developing **context-specific solutions**
- Strengthening the quality of decision-making

5.3.4 Framing the Conference Agenda

The opening remarks effectively framed the key themes that would guide the rest of the conference, including:

- The necessity of **inclusive governance**
- The importance of **youth engagement**
- The role of **religious and community leadership**
- The need for **integrated approaches combining security, development, and social cohesion**

6) Opening Remarks

The opening remarks provided a conceptual and analytical foundation for the conference discussions.

Key points included:

- The strategic importance of **state–society relations in fragile and transitioning regions**
- The need for **evidence-based policymaking**
- The role of academia in supporting **informed public discourse**

The remarks emphasized that:

Strong societies are built not only through institutions, but through the quality of interaction between those institutions and the people they serve.



7) Panel Discussion I: Youth, Education, and Social Cohesion

Overview

The **Youth Panel Discussion** served as a dynamic and inclusive platform, bringing together emerging voices and experienced practitioners to explore the role of youth in promoting **peace, civic engagement, and social cohesion** in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Newly Merged Districts.

The session reflected a strong commitment to ensuring that **youth perspectives are not only heard but meaningfully integrated into policy and community-level interventions.**

Panelists

The session featured a diverse group of panelists representing political leadership, civil society, media, and grassroots youth engagement:

- **Ms. Shagufta Malik** – Former Member of Provincial Assembly (Ex-MPA), contributing valuable insights on governance and youth inclusion in policymaking
- **Mr. Rizwan Mohmand** – Young journalist, community leader, and youth peace champion, representing the voice of media-driven youth engagement
- **Mr. Murtaza Mehsud** – President, Tribal Youth Association, highlighting perspectives from tribal youth and grassroots communities
- **Advocate Umar Khan** – Founder, Citizens’ Rights & Advocacy Forum (CRAF), focusing on legal empowerment and civic rights
- **Mr. Malik Bilal Khan** – Peace Ambassador and youth activist, advocating for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives



7.1 Key Themes Discussed

- Role of youth as **agents of peace and social transformation**
- Importance of **education and awareness in countering extremism**
- Strengthening **youth participation in governance and civic processes**
- Addressing **challenges faced by youth in marginalized and tribal areas**
- Responsible use of **digital platforms and social media**

7.2 Key Insights from Panelists

The panelists collectively emphasized that:

- Youth must be provided with **structured platforms for engagement rather than symbolic inclusion**
- There is a pressing need to **bridge the gap between state institutions and young citizens**
- **Media and communication channels**, if used responsibly, can serve as powerful tools for promoting unity and countering misinformation
- Youth from tribal and marginalized regions require **targeted opportunities, representation, and capacity-building support**

The discussion also highlighted that **dialogue between the state and youth is essential to reduce mistrust and foster a sense of ownership in national development.**

7.3 Youth Panel Recommendations

A key outcome of the Youth Panel Discussion was the formulation of a comprehensive set of **practical and policy-oriented recommendations** aimed at rebuilding trust between the state and society. These recommendations emerged as a **collective reflection of all panelists**, representing diverse perspectives from governance, media, civil society, legal advocacy, and grassroots youth engagement.

The panel collectively emphasized the importance of initiating **continuous, structured, and institutionalized dialogue** between the state, society, and youth to restore trust and address concerns effectively. In this regard, it was recommended that **institutionalized youth forums be established at district and provincial levels**, ensuring sustained engagement and meaningful participation of young people in governance processes.

A strong emphasis was placed on the role of **education as a foundation for social cohesion**. Panelists highlighted that educational and religious institutions—including universities, colleges, schools, Madaris, and mosques—should be actively engaged in promoting dialogue, civic awareness, and intellectual discourse. It was further recommended that **peace education, civic responsibility, and critical thinking be integrated into academic curricula**, enabling youth to develop informed perspectives and constructive engagement skills.

The panel also stressed the importance of **respecting diversity of opinion**. Youth perspectives, questions, and criticism should be acknowledged and addressed constructively, allowing dialogue to serve as a means of guidance rather than suppression. This approach is essential for building trust, strengthening democratic values, and encouraging open engagement.

Meaningful inclusion of youth in national discourse was identified as a critical priority. Panelists emphasized that young people must be provided with **genuine representation in policy discussions and decision-making processes**, enabling them to develop a sense of ownership in state affairs. In this context, it was also recommended to **promote youth leadership and entrepreneurship initiatives**, empowering young individuals to contribute actively to social and economic development.

The importance of **transparency and accountability within state institutions** was highlighted as a key factor in restoring public confidence and strengthening state–society relations. Panelists noted that trust can only be rebuilt when governance systems are perceived as fair, open, and responsive.

Furthermore, the panel emphasized the need for **collective efforts by religious scholars, educators, and civil society actors** to promote tolerance, unity, and intellectual cohesion within society. Strengthening collaboration between **youth, policymakers, and civil society organizations** was identified as essential for creating inclusive and sustainable solutions.

Recognizing the growing influence of digital platforms, it was recommended to **strengthen digital literacy among youth** in order to counter propaganda, misinformation, and polarization, while promoting responsible and constructive use of media.

The discussion concluded with a shared understanding that **sustainable peace and stability can only be achieved through dialogue and inclusion**, and that youth holding differing views should be engaged constructively rather than marginalized.

8) Panel Discussion II: High-Level Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Peace, Governance, and Social Cohesion

8.1 Overview

The second panel discussion served as the **centrepiece of the conference**, bringing together senior representatives from **government, security, religious leadership, and the development sector**.

Chaired by the **Honourable Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi**, the session provided a **high-level platform for strategic dialogue** on the evolving dynamics of peace, governance, and social cohesion in the province.

This panel was particularly significant as it bridged **policy, security, religious, and community perspectives**, offering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Newly Merged Districts.



8.2 Panelists

The panel featured distinguished speakers with diverse institutional backgrounds:

- **Hon. Faisal Karim Kundi** – Governor, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Chair of the Session)
- **Major General (Retd.) Inam-ul-Haq** – Security Analyst, Columnist, and former senior military official
- **Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif** – Senior Advisor on Information and Public Relations, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa / Senior Advisor on Regional Stability & Security, IRCRA

- **Maulana Yousaf Shah** – Prominent religious scholar and community leader
- **Mr. Arshad Rashid** – Chief Programmes, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF)

8.3 Key Themes Discussed

The panel deliberated on a range of critical issues central to peace and cohesion in KP:

- Evolving **security dynamics and counter-extremism challenges**
- Strengthening **state–society trust and institutional legitimacy**
- Role of **religious leadership in promoting harmony and countering extremism**
- Importance of **inclusive governance and participatory policymaking**
- Contribution of the **development sector in addressing socio-economic disparities**
- Addressing **misinformation, propaganda, and digital polarization**

8.4 Key Insights from Panelists

1. Security and Stability Perspective

Major General (Retd.) Inam-ul-Haq highlighted:



- The changing nature of **security challenges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**, particularly in the Newly Merged Districts
- The need for sustained **civil-military coordination**
- The importance of **community engagement and local ownership** in ensuring long-term peace

He emphasized that **security solutions alone are insufficient without societal alignment and trust-building mechanisms.**

2. Governance and State Leadership Perspective

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi underscored:

- The centrality of **inclusive governance and public trust** in achieving sustainable peace
- The importance of **continuous dialogue between the state and citizens**
- The commitment of the provincial leadership to **open and accessible governance**

He stated that:

“State–society dialogue is the need of the time, and the doors of the Governor House are open for such engagements.”

He also called upon youth and citizens to:

- Strengthen **trust in credible information sources**
- Use **social media responsibly to promote unity rather than division**



3. Policy and Institutional Framework Perspective

Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif focused on:

- The need for **coherent policy frameworks and institutional coordination**
- Strengthening **provincial governance mechanisms**
- Addressing **policy gaps affecting peace and stability**

He emphasized that **inclusive policymaking and legal frameworks must align with ground realities to ensure effectiveness.**



4. Religious Leadership and Social Cohesion Perspective

Maulana Yousaf Shah highlighted:

- The influential role of **religious scholars in shaping public narratives**
- The importance of promoting **interfaith harmony and tolerance**
- The responsibility of **religious institutions in countering extremist ideologies**



He stressed that **religion should serve as a unifying force, promoting peace, compassion, and coexistence.**

5. Development Sector Perspective

Mr. Arshad Rashid (PPAF) emphasized:

- The link between **poverty, marginalization, and instability**
- The importance of **community-driven development interventions**
- Strengthening **grassroots resilience through inclusive development programs**

He highlighted PPAF's role in:

- Empowering communities
- Supporting **local peacebuilding initiatives**
- Enhancing **socio-economic stability in vulnerable regions**



8.5 Cross-Cutting Discussion Themes

The panel collectively acknowledged that:

- There is a need to **reduce the gap between the state and society**
- **Geopolitical challenges** require stronger internal cohesion
- Youth and institutions must work together to **counter terrorism and extremism**
- Dialogue must move beyond events and become **institutionalized processes**

The discussion also recognized the importance of:

- **Tribal leadership and jirga systems**
- **Civil society engagement**
- **Media responsibility in shaping narratives**

8.6 Key Outcomes of the Panel

The high-level discussion resulted in several critical takeaways:

- Strong consensus on **multi-stakeholder collaboration as a prerequisite for peace**
- Recognition of **religious and community leadership as key partners**
- Emphasis on **institutionalizing dialogue platforms across KP**
- Agreement on the importance of **development-led peacebuilding approaches**

8.7 Key Recommendations

Governance & Policy

- Institutionalize **regular state–society dialogue forums**
- Promote **participatory governance at local levels**

Security & Stability

- Strengthen **civil-military-community coordination**
- Invest in **preventive approaches to extremism**

Religious Engagement

- Engage religious scholars in **structured peacebuilding initiatives**
- Promote **interfaith and intra-faith dialogue**

Development & Inclusion

- Expand **community-based development programs**
- Address **economic disparities in tribal and marginalized areas**

Information & Media

- Counter misinformation through **credible communication strategies**
- Promote **responsible digital engagement**

8.8 Conclusion of the Panel Recommendations

The second panel discussion reinforced the understanding that:

Sustainable peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa requires a **holistic approach combining governance, security, development, and societal engagement.**

By bringing together **state leadership, security experts, religious scholars, and development practitioners**, the session provided a **comprehensive roadmap for strengthening peace and social cohesion in the region.**



9) Synthesis of Key Messages and Cross-Cutting Insights

Beyond individual sessions, the conference produced a set of **overarching insights** that cut across thematic areas and stakeholder perspectives.

9.1 State–Society Dialogue as a Strategic Imperative

A central conclusion was that **state–society dialogue is not optional—it is essential for stability and cohesion**.

Participants emphasized that:

- Institutional disconnect leads to **mistrust and fragmentation**
- Dialogue must be **continuous, structured, and inclusive**
- Engagement should extend beyond urban centres to **marginalized and tribal areas**

9.2 Inclusive Governance and Participatory Policymaking

The discussions underscored that governance systems must:

- Reflect the **diversity of society**
- Incorporate feedback from **citizens and communities**
- Move toward **participatory models of decision-making**

Inclusive governance was identified as a key driver of:

- Public trust
- Social stability
- Policy effectiveness

9.3 Role of Youth, Media, and Academia

The conference highlighted the interconnected roles of:

- **Youth** as change-makers
- **Media** as narrative shapers
- **Academia** as knowledge producers

Together, these actors can:

- Promote **informed discourse**
- Counter misinformation
- Strengthen democratic engagement

9.4 Religious Leadership as a Force for Unity

Religious scholars were recognized as influential actors capable of:

- Promoting **peaceful interpretations of religion**
- Countering extremist ideologies
- Strengthening **interfaith harmony**

Their engagement is critical in shaping **societal attitudes and behaviors**.

9.5 Development as a Foundation for Peace

A strong linkage was established between:

- **Socio-economic development**
- **Social cohesion and stability**

Participants emphasized that:

- Poverty and marginalization contribute to **instability and conflict**
- Development initiatives must be **inclusive and community-driven**

9.6 Information Integrity and Responsible Communication

In the digital age, managing information has become a critical challenge. The conference stressed:

- The need to counter **misinformation and propaganda**
- Encouraging citizens, particularly youth, to rely on **credible sources**
- Promoting the use of digital platforms for **unity rather than division**

10) Concluding Session and Leadership Reflections

The concluding session brought together the key themes of the conference, translating them into a **coherent vision for the way forward**.

10.1 Closing Reflections

Speakers emphasized:

- The importance of **sustained partnerships between state and society**
- The need to translate dialogue into **actionable outcomes**
- Commitment to continuing such platforms for **policy engagement and community dialogue**

10.2 Chief Guest Address: Governor Faisal Karim Kundi

In his concluding address, the Honourable **Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi**, delivered a comprehensive and forward-looking speech, emphasizing the urgency of strengthening **state–society relations through structured and sustained dialogue mechanisms**.

He underscored that the challenges facing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—particularly in the Newly Merged Districts—cannot be addressed through isolated interventions. Instead, they require **continuous engagement, inclusive participation, and coordinated institutional efforts**.

A central theme of his address was the need to **decentralize dialogue processes** and bring conversations closer to communities. In this regard, he explicitly emphasized that:

“District-wise dialogues must be initiated across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the Newly Merged Districts and adjacent regions, to ensure that local voices are heard, understood, and integrated into governance processes.”

He further assured participants that the **Governor House would serve as an open and supportive platform for such initiatives**, reaffirming the provincial leadership’s commitment to fostering inclusive engagement:

“The Governor House will continue to host and support such dialogues, providing a space where stakeholders from all segments of society can come together for constructive engagement.”

In addition to community-level dialogue, the Governor highlighted the importance of addressing broader institutional relationships, particularly emphasizing the need for **open and constructive discussions on civil–military relations**. He noted that:

“There is a need for meaningful dialogue on civil–military relations, ensuring alignment, mutual understanding, and coordinated efforts for long-term peace and stability.”

He stressed that strengthening these relationships is critical for:

- Enhancing institutional coherence
- Building public confidence
- Ensuring that governance and security efforts are **complementary rather than fragmented**

The Governor also called upon youth and citizens to:

- Rely on **credible and authentic sources of information**
- Use social media as a tool for **unity, awareness, and positive engagement, rather than division**

Concluding his address, he reiterated that:

“State–society dialogue is the need of the time, and sustainable peace can only be achieved when institutions and communities work together in a spirit of trust, inclusivity, and shared responsibility.”

11) Recognition and Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony served both as a formal conclusion and a symbolic acknowledgment of **grassroots contributions to peacebuilding**.

11.1 Shield Distribution

Shields were presented to:

- Peacemakers
- Local jirgas
- Partner organizations

This recognition highlighted the vital role of:

- Community leadership
- Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms
- Local initiatives in sustaining peace







11.2 Vote of Thanks and Closing

The event concluded with:

- A formal vote of thanks
- A collective acknowledgment of all participants and stakeholders
- A closing dua

This final segment reinforced the spirit of **collaboration, respect, and shared responsibility** that defined the conference.



12) Strategic Recommendations and Way Forward

Drawing on the extensive discussions, leadership insights, and participant feedback, the conference produced a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at **institutionalizing state–society dialogue, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting sustainable peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Newly Merged Districts**.

These recommendations are structured across key strategic pillars to ensure clarity, coherence, and effective implementation.

12.1 Institutionalizing Multi-Level Dialogue Mechanisms

A central outcome of the conference was the recognition that **state–society dialogue must evolve from ad-hoc engagements into structured, continuous, and institutionalized processes**.

It is recommended that:

- **District-wise dialogue platforms** be established across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the Newly Merged Districts and adjacent regions such as:
 - North and South Waziristan, Tank, and Dera Ismail Khan
 - Bannu and adjoining areas
 - Kurram (Upper and Lower) and surrounding districts
 - Khyber and Peshawar
 - Mohmand and Bajaur
- These dialogues should:
 - Be conducted on a **regular and structured basis**
 - Reflect **local realities and community priorities**
 - Serve as a bridge between **citizens and state institutions**
- Provincial leadership support should be leveraged, with the **Governor House serving as a facilitating platform for dialogue and engagement initiatives**

12.2 Ensuring Inclusive Multi-Stakeholder Participation

Effective dialogue requires the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders to ensure **balanced, credible, and impactful outcomes**.

It is recommended that all dialogue platforms incorporate:

- Government and policy representatives
- Civil society organizations
- Youth leaders and community actors

- Religious scholars and traditional leadership structures
- Security stakeholders, including the **military perspective**

The inclusion of diverse perspectives will enable:

- Comprehensive understanding of challenges
- Stronger coordination between institutions
- Increased public trust in dialogue outcomes



12.3 Thematic and Group-Specific Dialogue Frameworks

In addition to geographic decentralization, dialogue initiatives should be designed around **specific societal groups**, allowing for more targeted and meaningful engagement.

It is recommended that structured dialogues be organized with:

- **Social media influencers and digital content creators**
(to shape narratives, counter misinformation, and promote responsible engagement)
- **Writers, poets, and intellectuals**
(to strengthen cultural discourse and promote narratives of unity and peace)
- **Tribal elders and jirga systems**
(to leverage traditional leadership and community-based conflict resolution)
- **Youth groups and student communities**
(to promote leadership, civic participation, and peacebuilding engagement)

- **Religious scholars (Ulema)**
(to promote inclusive religious narratives and counter extremism)

This approach ensures that dialogue processes are:

- Context-specific
- Inclusive of influential societal voices
- More effective in addressing underlying issues

12.4 Strengthening Civil–Military–Society Coordination

The conference emphasized the importance of fostering **constructive engagement between civil institutions, military stakeholders, and society**.

It is recommended that:

- Dedicated dialogue platforms be established to address **civil–military relations**, focusing on:
 - Enhancing mutual understanding
 - Aligning institutional roles
 - Strengthening coordination for peace and stability
- Such engagement should be integrated into broader state–society dialogue frameworks to ensure:
 - Institutional coherence
 - Improved public confidence
 - Effective governance and security outcomes



12.5 Addressing Misperceptions and Building Public Trust

Participants strongly highlighted that dialogue plays a transformative role in **clarifying misunderstandings and rebuilding trust between the state and society**.

It is recommended that:

- Dialogue initiatives be expanded to **community and grassroots levels**
- Structured engagements be used to:
 - Address misconceptions about state institutions
 - Promote informed and constructive discourse
 - Reduce social fragmentation and mistrust

This approach will contribute to:

- Strengthening institutional legitimacy
- Enhancing citizen engagement
- Promoting social cohesion

12.6 Youth Integration and Leadership Development

Youth were identified as a critical stakeholder group whose meaningful inclusion is essential for sustainable peace.

It is recommended that:

- Youth be **institutionally integrated into dialogue platforms at all levels**
- Dedicated youth forums and engagement mechanisms be established
- Opportunities for youth leadership, civic participation, and community initiatives be expanded

This will enable:

- Greater ownership of peacebuilding processes
- Development of future leadership
- Strengthening of democratic engagement

12.7 Promoting Responsible Information and Digital Engagement

Recognizing the growing influence of digital platforms, it is recommended that:

- Efforts be made to promote **responsible use of social media**
- Awareness initiatives be developed to counter **misinformation and propaganda**

- Citizens, particularly youth, be encouraged to rely on **credible and authentic sources of information**

This will help:

- Prevent polarization
- Strengthen unity
- Support informed public discourse

12.8 National-Level Consolidation and Policy Integration

To ensure that local-level dialogue outcomes inform national policy, it is recommended that:

- A **National Conference be convened in Islamabad**, bringing together:
 - Policymakers
 - Provincial leadership
 - Community representatives
 - Civil society and development actors
- This platform should:
 - Present findings from district and thematic dialogues
 - Facilitate policy alignment
 - Integrate grassroots insights into national frameworks

12.9 Recognition and Strengthening of Community-Based Peace Initiatives

The conference highlighted the critical role of **community-level organizations working on peace and social cohesion**, particularly in underserved regions.

It is recommended that:

- A **“Community Peace Award” or “Civil Society Recognition Award”** be established at the national level
- This initiative should:
 - Recognize contributions of grassroots organizations, local leaders, and community actors
 - Provide national visibility to their work
 - Encourage replication of successful peacebuilding models
- Award recipients should be provided opportunities to:
 - Present their work at national platforms
 - Share best practices and lessons learned
 - Engage with policymakers and development partners

Way Forward

The conference concluded with a strong consensus that these recommendations must be translated into **structured, sustained, and collaborative actions**.

Key priorities moving forward include:

- Launching **pilot district-level and thematic dialogue initiatives**
- Developing **institutional frameworks for continuous engagement**
- Strengthening partnerships between:
 - Government institutions
 - Civil society organizations
 - Development partners
 - Community and religious leaders

The commitment expressed by provincial leadership—particularly the openness of the Governor House to facilitate dialogue—provides a **strong foundation for implementation**.

Final Reflection

The recommendations collectively reinforce a central and powerful conclusion:

Sustainable peace and social cohesion require a multi-level, inclusive, and continuous dialogue process that connects communities, institutions, and leadership within a shared framework of trust and collaboration.



*IRCRA–PPAF Regional Dialogue Conference
State–Society Dialogue, Peace, and Social Cohesion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*



13) Conclusion

The **IRCRA–PPAF Regional Dialogue Conference on State–Society Dialogue, Peace, and Social Cohesion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** marked a significant and timely initiative in advancing inclusive, multi-stakeholder engagement on one of the most critical issues facing the region—the relationship between the state and its citizens.

The conference successfully brought together a diverse spectrum of stakeholders, including government leadership, security experts, religious scholars, development practitioners, civil society representatives, media professionals, and youth leaders. This diversity not only enriched the discussions but also ensured that the dialogue reflected a **holistic and grounded understanding of the challenges and opportunities** in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Newly Merged Districts.

A central takeaway from the conference was the recognition that **sustainable peace and social cohesion cannot be achieved in isolation**. Instead, they require **continuous dialogue, inclusive participation, and coordinated action across all sectors of society**. The discussions consistently emphasized that bridging the gap between the state and society is not merely a policy objective, but a **strategic necessity for long-term stability and development**.

The two-panel structure of the conference—focusing on youth engagement and high-level multi-stakeholder dialogue—provided a comprehensive framework for understanding both grassroots realities and institutional perspectives. The Youth Panel highlighted the aspirations, concerns, and potential of young citizens, while the second panel brought forward insights from governance, security, religious, and development sectors. Together, these discussions underscored the importance of **integrating community voices with policy-level decision-making**.

Another key outcome was the strong consensus on the need to **institutionalize dialogue mechanisms**. Whether at the district level, through thematic group-based engagements, or at the national level, participants agreed that dialogue must be **structured, sustained, and inclusive**. The emphasis on engaging diverse groups—including youth, religious scholars, tribal elders, media influencers, and civil society—reflects a forward-looking approach that recognizes the complexity of modern societal dynamics.

The conference also highlighted the transformative potential of dialogue in **addressing misperceptions, rebuilding trust, and strengthening social cohesion**. Participant feedback clearly indicated that open and inclusive discussions can help bridge divides, clarify misunderstandings, and create a shared sense of purpose among stakeholders. Importantly, the commitment expressed by provincial leadership, particularly the willingness of the Governor House to facilitate and host future dialogues, provides a strong foundation for translating these discussions into **concrete actions and sustained initiatives**.

Looking ahead, the success of this conference must be measured not only by the quality of dialogue it generated, but by the **extent to which its recommendations are implemented**

and scaled. The proposed roadmap—encompassing district-level dialogues, thematic engagements, national-level consolidation, and recognition of grassroots efforts—offers a clear and actionable pathway forward.

In conclusion, the conference reaffirmed a fundamental principle:

Peace, stability, and social cohesion are built through dialogue, trust, and inclusion.

