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**Presentation of Pakistan's
4th Periodic Report**

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

By

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Government of Pakistan
Islamabad**

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Introductory Statement of Pakistan

**Madam Chairperson of UN CEDAW Committee,
Distinguished members of the Committee
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my privilege to represent the Government of Pakistan to discuss the 4th periodic report of our country in this august forum and to further apprise the Committee on Pakistan's Commitment and progress in implementing our obligations in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

The delegation originally was to be led by Mr. Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Human Rights. For reasons beyond his control, committing him to other official matters at home, he has regretfully not been able to make it here.

A number of federal and provincial parliamentarians who were part of the delegation also had to stay back in view of the upcoming elections in Pakistan.

Let me introduce members of Pakistan's delegation. My delegation comprises Mr. Shaigan Shareef Malik, Secretary, Ministry of Human Rights, Mr. Zamir Akram, Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations in Geneva, Ms. Mariam Aftab, Counsellor, Mr. Afaq Ahmad, Third Secretary, Permanent Mission of Pakistan, Geneva and Ms. Shabana Hamid, Deputy Director, Ministry of Human Rights and myself, Khawar Mumtaz, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women.

Before proceeding further, I would like to share with you the fact that the compilation of the fourth periodic report is a combined effort of Government entities and civil society organizations. It was prepared by the Ministry of Women Development under the supervision of a Working Group headed by the then Chairperson of the National Commission on the Status of Women Parliamentarians, representatives of relevant Federal and provincial governments and civil society organizations. The report was then presented to and discussed by the Parliament and has also been shared on the official website of the Ministry of Human Rights.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Before presenting the report, I would like to state that Pakistan is a developing country which is confronted with the scourge of terrorism and continues to face myriad

challenges in the full realization of human rights of its citizens, particularly women. But that should not deter us from acknowledging the progress that we have made thus far, rather it should serve as a guide for the future.

Let me begin with a brief overview of the context within which Pakistan has to operate in order to address discrimination against women and undertake interventions to promote and secure their status as equal citizens. The period covered by the report has been one of the most challenging in recent years for Pakistan, in terms of improving the momentum of socio-economic development and implementing reforms particularly for women. The challenges may be summarized as:

1. The rise of extremism backed by the ruthless use of force whereby anyone opposed to the extremists' worldview is targeted. These in the past few years have included people of different sects and ethnic groups, religions, security forces, government installations, schools, as well as women and girls, women human rights defenders and even women health workers as evidenced by the attack on Malala Yusufzai last year, on Farida Afridi in KPK and polio vaccinators across the country. Law enforcement operations against extremists/terrorists in different parts of the country add to the physical, emotional and livelihood insecurity of women and girls.
- 2). The age old customs and practices embedded in our social structures like killing in the name of honour, forced and early marriages, wani, swara, etc.
- 3). Natural disasters have posed humanitarian challenges in the form of displacement of millions of people due to the floods of 2010-11. Women suffered more.
- 4). Devolution of power to the provinces under the 18th Constitutional Amendment was a historic step towards greater autonomy and space for provincial governments to address social problems. The move from a centralized system to the provincial one is a slower process than anticipated and is faced with the problems of integration and coordination of policies from the national to the provincial levels. Women's development is now devolved to the provinces with functioning Women Development Departments.

After the 18th amendment, the Ministry of Human Rights has been entrusted with the mandate to deal with human rights aspect of women empowerment and gender mainstreaming.

Madam Chairperson and distinguished members

I would like to reiterate Government's resolve to address women's discrimination. Almost half of Pakistan's population which is women deserves a strong effort to make them equal citizens. The Government has used a multi-pronged strategy of legislation, policies and programmes to reach out to women, especially the most deprived. Let me use this opportunity to highlight some specific measures and affirmative action in the reporting period that the Government of Pakistan has taken to eliminate discrimination against women of Pakistan and to empower them.

Pakistan, while formulating its state laws, policy frameworks and implementation mechanisms remains cognizant of its obligations under international human rights instruments, to which it is a state party. The Constitution does not allow laws or customary practices inconsistent with or in derogation of Fundamental Rights.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Legislative measures taken by the Government:

To empower the women of Pakistan, a number of laws have been introduced and enacted to address specific aspects of discrimination against women and/or women's rights.

Protection Against Harassment at Workplace Act 2010: As increasing number of women enter the public sphere they face sexual harassment in their places of work.

Cognizant of the situation two laws against sexual harassment were enacted by the Parliament in March 2010: Protection against Harassment at Workplace Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act to amend the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure to criminalize harassment at public and work places. Under the Act sexual harassment is now punishable with imprisonment of up to 3 years or substantial fine or both. In line with the provisions of the Act, approximately all government institutions have constituted Anti-harassment committees consisting of at least one woman member to address complaints against harassment of women and an appellate forum has been established in the form of the Office of Ombudsperson in 2011. Implementation Watch Committee functions at the federal and provincial levels to oversee the implementation of these laws. Private enterprises and CSOs are also required to implement the law and many have adopted the prescribed code of conduct.

Frequent awareness raising sessions are also organized.

Prevention Of Anti Women Practices Act 2011. Enacted on 22nd December 2011, as Criminal Law (Third Amendment) Act, 2011, is perhaps the most significant of all recent legislations. It aims to banish harmful, old-age customary practices like giving a female in marriage or otherwise in *badla-e-sulha*, *wanni* or *swara*, depriving a woman from

inheriting property, forced marriages, marriage with the Holy Quran. Various provisions of CEDAW are addressed through this Act. The foremost significance of this law is the acknowledgement of women's discrimination through customary practices and criminalizing them. This has come a long way from trying to justify discrimination on the basis of customary practice.

Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act 2011, commonly known as Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Law has been enacted whereby the act of mutilating women by the use of acids or other corrosive substance is punishable with death or life imprisonment.

National Commission on the Status of Women Act 2012 has given greater financial and administrative autonomy to the Commission for the promotion and protection of social, economic, political and legal rights of women. In addition the Commission acting as a Court can inquire and investigate cases of non observance and violations of women's rights. It can also make recommendations for consequential actions to competent authorities. The Commission can also review existing laws and policies and make recommendations to eliminate discrimination. Previously, the Commission had comparatively limited authority.

National Commission on Human Rights Act 2012 has been enacted and is being established in line with the Paris Principles. Upon Commissioning it would supplement the work being done by the NCSW.

The following laws proposed by the NCSW are in the legislative process:

- i. **Domestic Violence (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill, 2012** to address domestic violence
- ii. **Hindu Marriage Bill 2012,**
- iii. **Christian Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2012**
- iv. **Christian Divorce Amendment Bill 2012**
- v. **Prevention and Control of Women Trafficking Act, 2010**

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Policies

National Judicial Policy 2009 has provided for the enhancement of women's access to justice and emphasized that family cases should be decided within 3-6 months, suits and appeals arising out of family cases, divorce, dissolution of marriages, custody of minors, guardianship, maintenance of wives and minors and inheritance cases shall be decided within 1-4 months. Priority has been given to women and juvenile cases for quick disposal.

Home based workers policy: The Ministry of Human Rights is finalizing a Home Based Worker Policy in consultation with other Federal Ministries and Provincial Governments. The policy contains plans and programmes for the protection and promotion of rights and benefits of home based workers majority of whom are women (estimated 65%). Punjab Government has a draft Home based workers Policy ready for adoption.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Gender-disaggregated data: Collecting accurate gender disaggregated data especially related to violence against women is an issue with most countries and Pakistan is no exception. Being mindful of the significance and implications of such data, Government of Pakistan established the 'Gender Crime Cell' (GCC) within the National Police Bureau (part of the Federal Ministry of Interior) in April 2006. The Gender Crime Cell gathers, collates and analyzes data of cases of violence against women, especially of gang rape, rape, abduction, kidnapping and karo-kari i.e. honor killing. One of the most significant revelations of the GCC data was the drastic drop in the number of women prisoners due to changes in the Hudood Ordinances by the Women Protection Act 2006. Efforts are on to upgrade the Systems of data collection along-with training of police personnel

At the provincial level, Government of Punjab has established Women Crisis & Rehabilitation Help Desk and 24/7 toll free help line at district level which will maintain disaggregated data on gender- based violence. Government of Sindh collects data through complaint cells, media cells and Shaheed Benazir Centers for Women. Government of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (KPK) is collecting data through placement of separate 'report registers' to file complaints of all cases against women and children. Similarly, Government of Baluchistan gathers statistical data on gender based violence in collaboration with civil society organizations working on issues of women rights.

A number of other measures have also been undertaken by the Government of Pakistan to ensure compilation of disaggregated data and its availability. These include sensitization and capacity building of the Federal Bureau of Statistics and the Population Census Organization and aligning it with the SAARC gender database.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Women's development and economic empowerment:

Women Development Schemes have been developed and many steps have been taken to facilitate their role in the development of the country and at all levels. There are a number of micro-credit schemes instituted by the Government for rural and urban poor women. These have continued to expand with funding from various sources the most recent one being Akhuwat, interest free loan scheme for women introduced by a private charity

organization. The Punjab Bank has initiated “Women Entrepreneurship Scheme” for granting loans to commercial ventures by women for initiatives in private capacity, including day care centers, bakeries, eateries, catering, furniture, interior designing, boutiques, fitness gymnasias, event management, vocational institutes, driving schools, jewelry, clothing and accessories, and any other feasible projects.

However, perhaps the most significant initiative for women has been the **Benazir Income Support Program**, a double pronged scheme that envisages poverty reduction and at the same time aims at facilitating women’s empowerment. By by-passing gatekeepers and reaching out to women in poor households as recipients of a monthly stipend, the intervention has had the impact of raising the importance of the women in the household. The spin offs of the scheme have been an increase in the issuance of National Identity Cards for women (almost 85% women now have ID cards) which opens the way for other opportunities – development schemes, voting right, contesting elections, etc. Moreover, women now operate bio-metric cards and have been catapulted into using technology; at the same time their mobility has been enhanced. Additionally under the Program the costs of one child’s education from each BISP household is fully covered; there is a credit scheme for entrepreneurial undertakings backed by training in enterprise management and guidance, and there is a health insurance scheme. Seeking to cover over 7 million households, the program is a major change maker in perceptions on women.

Another land mark scheme instituted in Sindh and a model that may be replicated in other provinces is the Land to the Landless scheme instituted in 2009. Ownership and control over assets is seen as a critical ingredient in raising women’s position and gives them decision making space. Under the scheme title of the land is transferred to a woman alone. In a country where women are usually denied inheritance and land entitlement this is a land mark scheme. Over 6000 women have already received land under this; the title is backed by extension services and training which includes provision of seeds and access to markets. While the quality of land has varied from case to case, and obstacles have been raised in some instances by local powerful people the scheme has been assessed as successful.

In order to draw attention to the significance of women in public and economic life, the Prime Minister of Pakistan has declared 22nd December as National Day for the Rights of Working Women, 12 February as national Women Day and 11th October as Girl Child Day. The current year is being celebrated as a Year of the Girl Child.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Women’s political participation:

Political empowerment of women has been among the top priorities of the democratic government. The number of women in elected positions has shown a steady increase. Currently apart from 60 reserved seats, there are 16 directly elected women in the National Assembly. They hold 22.2 percent seats in the National Assembly, 17 percent seats in the Senate and 17.6 percent seats in the Provincial Assemblies. Women Parliamentarians formed a Women Parliamentarian Caucus in July 2009, which has been very effective in creating consensus on women's issues.

Women parliamentarians are among the most active legislators having initiated the majority of bills in the House. They head six important Standing Committees of the National Assembly and 6 Committees and one Sub-committee of the Senate. Local governments that served as political nurseries for women at the grass roots is a devolved subject and all provincial governments are in the process of legislating on this.

Women hold high public position including speaker of the National Assembly, the Deputy Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Sindh and first female governor of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Many individual women have been outstanding in the fields of art, literature and sports in the country and outside including UN Special Rapporteurs and Chair of a UN Working Group.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Provincial governments have also taken a number of steps to curb harmful practices and pervasive patriarchal attitudes. The Government of Punjab has introduced measures for safeguarding property rights/right of inheritance of women. Government of KPK has taken legislative initiatives to curb harmful practices, i.e., Right to Ownership (Women) Act 2011 and Provincial Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2009; Anti Customary Practice Act 2012 that specifically addresses KPK's anti-women custom.

Similarly, Government of Sindh has established complaint centers, working women hostels and commenced a number of awareness raising programs.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Pakistan is fully cognizant of the fact that education is a key to empowerment of women in all spheres. Therefore, the Government has taken a number of steps to overcome obstacles to women and girls' education.

In the 18th Constitutional Amendment, Article 25A provides for free mandatory schooling up to the secondary level. The demand for girl's education is growing and almost universal, however, the resources constraint make it difficult for government to keep pace with the demand. Provincial governments have introduced a number of incentives to get girls enrolled in secondary schools including monthly stipend, free textbooks, uniforms and nutritional support to girls' schools. These have resulted in increased girls' enrollment and retention. Construction of library blocks, boundary walls and provision of missing facilities have been completed in various degree colleges. However, Government of KPK is facing bombardment at girl schools and in past five years more than 400 schools have been destroyed and 70% of them were girl's schools.

To increase and retain enrollment of girls in Balochistan and Punjab, the World Food Program provides wheat and oil, primarily for girls, throughout the Province.

The Government of Sindh has introduced multiple technical education and vocational training programs under Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program (BBSYDP) with a particular focus on women. The Program aims to provide opportunities for short-term employment and skill development to approximately 100,000 semi-literate and educated unemployed youth in Sindh for a period varying between 3 months to one year. Skill development programme for women convicts is being implemented by National Vocational and Technical Education Commission (NAVTEC). The Punjab Government has a scheme (Punjab Skill Development Fund) in place across the province to provide women skills for jobs and link them to employment. An ambitious programme it includes numeracy and basic literacy skills as integral part of training. In addition Punjab Government has widely distributed laptops to deserving college students.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

Although in pursuance to 18th Amendment to the Constitution, **health sector** has been devolved to the provinces, breast care clinics have been established by the federal government at all nuclear medical centers. Polio eradication campaigns continue to be organized by the Federal Government.

Among various health and reproductive health related interventions 4.5 million women out of 5 million in high risk districts have been vaccinated by Lady Health Workers. Mobile Health Units are already in operation since January, 2011. The Program for Family Planning and Primary Health Care has been launched exclusively for women in the provinces.

Maternal & Child Health Program has been launched by the government in order to improve Maternal and Neonatal Health services with the aim to provide improved access to high quality Mother and Child Health and Family Planning services, train 10,000 community midwives, provide comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care (EmONC) services in 275 hospitals/health facilities, basic EmONC services in 550 health facilities, and family planning services in all health outlets.

As we speak the Reproductive Health Bill is tabled for adoption having gone through the Standing Committee.

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the committee

To conclude, despite all challenges, Government of Pakistan has made efforts to address women's issues and discrimination. It has successfully established a legal and policy framework and now has to focus on mechanisms for effective implementation. Positively there is collaboration with civil society organizations in service delivery, awareness raising, skill development and capacity building. A large number of organizations working at the gross-roots level identify gaps and shortcomings for government to address.

My delegation and I now welcome your questions.

Thank you all.