

**Review of Pakistan's Fifth Report to the Convention on the Elimination of all
forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
Opening Statement**

12th February 2020

Madam Chair and distinguished members of the Committee

It is my pleasure to present Pakistan's fifth periodic CEDAW report on behalf of the Government of Pakistan. The Report has been prepared through a comprehensive consultative process engaging all relevant bodies at both federal and provincial levels. This includes provincial government departments, CEDAW committees, the national and provincial Commissions on the Status of Women, the Womens Parliamentary Caucus, the Working Group headed by the Minister for Human Rights, UN Agencies and prominent NGOs and Civil Society Organizations.

Our delegation is representative of some of these institutions from the centre as well as from the provinces. We are here to reaffirm our commitment to CEDAW and to engage in a dialogue which will help Pakistan further in its journey to the true and full actualisation of women's rights.

Allow me to introduce my delegation:

- Ms. Rabiya Javeri Agha, Secretary, Ministry of Human Rights
- Muhammad Kamran Azam Khan Rajar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Human Rights
- Ms. Alia Shahid, Secretary, Women Development Department, Government of Sindh
- Ms Aisha Mughal, Transgender Expert, Ministry of Human Rights

Madam Chair,

The Constitution of Pakistan 1973 provides an extensive and robust over-arching constitutional framework wherein the state guarantees fundamental human rights and freedoms to all its citizens. The 18th Constitutional Amendment empowers the provinces to realise these rights through concrete legislative and policy measures in their own respective areas.

The Human Rights architecture at the federal level includes the Supreme Court Human Rights Cell, Federal Ministry of Human Rights, a Federal Treaty

Implementation Cell, National Assembly and Senate Standing Committees on Human Rights.

The Human Rights architecture at the provinces includes: High Court Human Rights Cells, Provincial Human Rights and Women Development Departments, Treaty Implementation Cells, CEDAW and Standing Committees as well as independent Provincial Human Rights and women's Commissions.

Moreover, National / Provincial Task Forces, legal committees and an Inter-Provincial Ministerial Group on gender serve to improve coordination between the centre and the provinces and act as advisory forums to recommend on women's empowerment related initiatives.

To ensure synchronisation on human rights between federal and provincial authorities, the Ministry of Human Rights monitors and coordinates with all provincial governments to ensure a right based approach in policy making, and implementation. Inter-provincial and inter-ministerial committees and task forces work to create synergy between all authorities working towards the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the country.

In the spirit of ensuring further coordination and awareness on human rights, especially treaty body reporting, the Government of Pakistan, through the Ministry of Human Rights, the provincial human rights departments, with support of UNDP, has undertaken institutional reforms to strengthen the country's treaty body reporting mechanism.

The pivot of this, is the development and operationalization of an innovative digital system to mitigate observed challenges in human rights data collection and to strengthen Pakistan's human rights reporting. The system, titled the Human Rights Information Management System (HRIMS), accounts for Pakistan's decentralized governance structure, under which provincial governments hold responsibility for implementing and monitoring many human rights subjects, including women, health, education, social welfare and labour. The HRIMS includes both data management software and a set of nationally contextualized human rights indicators, developed through a national consultative process based on international best practices on the Human Rights-Based Approach to Data.

Standardized and endorsed indicators provide a common tool for provincial and federal governments to interpret and measure progress in human rights

implementation. The (HRIMS) Human Rights Information Management System which is now part of Ministry of Human Rights 2020 development budget, follows guidelines of the OHCHR. Substantive empirical data gathered through this system will form the basis of future policies.

Madam Chair

Women in Pakistan play an active role in every field of life; ranging from education to economy to law enforcement including the police, the army and the air force. As peacekeepers, Pakistani women have been awarded the UN Medal for exemplary service in Congo. Women continue to hold senior posts across departments; as cabinet members, as superior courts judges, as vice chancellors. The tradition set by Fatima Jinnah and Benazir Bhutto continues to thrive in Pakistan's political landscape.

The National Assembly has 60 reserved seats for women (22%). In the upper house the reserved quota for women is 17%. In order to ensure representation of women, the current government has three female ministers, one minister of state, and three women special assistants to the Prime Minister. In fact, two cabinet members who lead the charge on women development are both women; Shireen Mazari, Minister of Human Rights and Sania Nishtar, Chair of Ehsaas program.

The equal and fundamental rights of women are enshrined in Pakistan's Constitution, including, but not limited to, article 25 which states "there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex." Gender equality and women's empowerment continue to be our top priority and this is reflected in our five-year plan on policy interventions for gender mainstreaming. Our government has launched an Action Plan on Human Rights which sets out four key human rights priority areas concerning vulnerable segments of the society, including the protection of women's rights.

Pakistan affirmed its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by adopting the SDGs as its own national development agenda in 2016. In 2018, the Government designed and approved a National SDGs Framework, approved by the National Economic Council. Learning from the experience of MDGs, Pakistan's national and provincial assemblies established the SDG Taskforces to oversee progress on goals. Pakistan submitted its Voluntary National Review this year.

The Beijing World Conference 1995 presented a landmark in the global quest for ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment. The Government of Pakistan committed to the principles set out in Beijing launched a National Plan of Action (NPA) for Women indicating interventions in 12 critical areas with one additional area (Women with Disabilities). This was followed a by National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women. Recently, the Government submitted its' Beijing Plus 25 Review Report, indicating progress in 12 critical areas and outlining challenges faced to achieving its agenda.

Madam Chair,

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of Pakistan's achievements in the realm of women rights;

In women's political participation, key steps have been taken to improve the representation of women in the political arena. Gender inequality in voter registration has been recognized as an important challenge by the Elections Act 2017. The Election Commission of Pakistan's efforts added about 10.6 million men and 9.1 million women to the electoral rolls since the election of May 2013- a total increase of 19.7 million voters that brought the size of Pakistan's current electorate to 105.9 million.

The Elections Act 2017 recognizes that reducing gender inequality in voter turnout is an important goal and therefore ensures minimum of 10 % women voters without which elections may be declared null and void. This was the case in PK25 Shangla which were declared void by ECP due to non-attendance of women voters.

The Election Commission has also set up a Gender & disability Working group and a code of conduct for security officials at polling stations. A Gender mainstreaming strategy is in place to ensure special measures to register female voters.

Pakistan has also taken significant legislative initiatives to uplift the status of women, particularly to address violence against women and institute social protection measures. The Acid and Burn Crime Act, 2018 was passed to prevent the misuse of corrosive substances and to provide treatment, rehabilitation, legal support and protection to acid and burn victims. Strong support of civil society and greater awareness through media has led to a decrease in acid attacks by 85%. Furthermore, there has also been a concomitant increase of 70% in registration of all cases regarding acid based violence against women.

Since its inception in December 2015, the Ministry of Human Rights has grown exponentially from a small cell with 100 persons to a large ministry of over 2000 officials. Our mandate has expanded to address, among others issues, those of disability, of old age, business and human rights and climate change and its impact on women and children.

Government of Pakistan is developing new outreach programs and initiatives. Based on the principle of provincial growth and capacity building, Ministry of Human Rights recently conducted an extensive needs assessment of the Ministry as well as all provincial human rights departments, including TICs.

As we expand so do our methodologies and our tools. This includes the set-up of an NMRF based on OHCHR guidelines. Ministry of Human Rights is also in the process of setting up a new web site with extensive human rights referencing to serve as an on-line recourse centre for students and citizens alike.

The Ministry has also recently concluded a very comprehensive research on the harmonisation of all ratified UN treaties with Pakistan's Constitution, its domestic law and its jurisprudence.

In our commitment to ensure collection of authentic, and comprehensive data, the Government of Pakistan, through Ministry of human rights and Unicef launched a nationwide survey on child labour—the last survey was 23 years ago. The survey is the first time that Pakistan is using the SIMPOC 'Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labor through a fully digital platform. Through this household-based child labour survey, Pakistan will have comprehensive data on the economic exploitation of children – a key child rights issue. It will also support Pakistan in realising SDG 8.7 which calls for eradicating child labor in all its forms by 2015.

The success of policy-making decisions and reforms in the social sector is subject to greater use of empirical data. With regards to the issue of data on disability, especially women with disabilities, the Government of Pakistan, through the Bureau of Statistics, has committed to collect data on Incheon Strategy through PSLM Survey 2020-21 and Pakistan Labour Force Survey. The current Multiple Indicator System survey MICS is now using the Washington Group of Questions on disability for the first time in Pakistan.

Madam Chair

Pakistan has set up Women Protection Centres, Women Police Stations and helplines have been established all over the country to provide shelter and support to victims of gender based violence. Comprehensive SOPS been developed for shelter homes and, with support of UNWOMEN, an Essential Services Package program been set up to ensure provision of quality services to women victims of violence.

Through extensive nationwide consultations Ministry of Human Rights has also developed guidelines for police interaction with transgender persons and sensitization trainings of police on transgender issues have been concluded in Punjab and ICT. A Gender Crime Cell has been set up at the National Police Bureau to monitor and compile data on gender related crimes-including those of transgender persons.

Some important legislative advancements that have occurred since the submission of our report include:

- Hindu Marriage Act, 2017 for solemnization, registration and termination of marriages of Hindu families.
- Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018 and Prevention of Smuggling Migrants Act, 2018 to address the issue of trafficking of women and children, and to prevent human smuggling
- Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 recognises self-determination of gender and prohibits discrimination and harassment of transgender.
- Juvenile Justice Act 2018 which recognises self-determination of age and for the first time establishes a program of diversion for juvenile offenders.
- The Alternate Dispute Resolution Act, 2017 to encourage formal mediation and at the same time discourage the convening of jirgas which have been banned throughout the country.

Draft bills include:

- Zainab Alert Bill,
- Domestic Workers Bill,
- Corporal Punishment bill
- Disability Bill,

- Rights of Senior Citizens bill which was developed as a result of an extensive research-done in collaboration with British Council, on situation of human rights of elder persons in Pakistan.

Madam Chair.

To ensure awareness of all laws and to sensitize citizens on human rights issues and our treaty obligations, the government conducts a vast array of awareness campaigns across the country. Pakistan commemorates International Women's Day, Rural Women's Day, National Working Women's Day, Girl Child Day, Human Rights Day, and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. We regularly engage popular media persons to act as Brand Ambassadors to speak out against sexual abuse and violence.

Last year, Ministry of Human Rights launched an innovative campaign to spread messages for girl's education and empowerment through truck art. The brightly painted murals on the trucks served as moving billboards, spreading messages of gender equality, to remote locations in the country. The government is also looking at using music and film to spread awareness on women's and children's rights.

Ministry of Human Rights through its Haqooq e Pakistan program also concluded 'Gender, Law and Human Rights' training of the lower judiciary in Sindh. By end of next year, it is estimated that all the lower judiciary of Sindh and Balochistan-including the prosecution- will have been trained in the gender and human rights components of national and international law and thus be sensitized to the intersectionality of gender and the administration of justice.

Although Pakistan has made significant progress in terms of developing and strengthening legislation for women, the training of judiciary and prosecution, lack of awareness on available redress mechanisms and poor economic conditions often prevent women from accessing justice.

The Legal Aid and Justice Authority Ordinance 2019, aims to provide preferential financial assistance to disadvantaged women, especially in relation to sexual offences. The Women in Distress and Detention Fund Act, 2018 institutes Rs. 46 Million to provide financial and legal assistance to women languishing in jails, as well as for the rehabilitation of women released from incarceration and living at shelters or crisis centres.

The Government has also established a statutory endowment fund called the Access to Justice Development Fund, with the objective of providing resources for legal assistance. As of today, Rs. 60 Million has been released.

The initiative to set up model courts to address backlog of murder and narcotics cases has also paid strong dividends. In such courts, judges do not allow unnecessary adjournments, attendance of witnesses is ensured through special process servers; the latest information technology devices are utilized to eliminate the need to transport accused persons and witnesses over long distances. In addition, the Investigations Superintendent of Police of each district acts as the focal person and Monitoring and Evaluation cells periodically report on the performance of such courts. Since their inception, public reports have highlighted model trial courts as a “silent revolution in judicial history”. In Sindh alone, as of June 2019, 597 murder cases and 541 narcotics cases have been decided in 27 model courts across the province.

Madam Chair,

At a larger level, the economic empowerment of women is one of our key priorities. In October 2019, the Government issued the ‘Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Ordinance’ to ensure women receive their legal share of inheritance in property. A campaign regarding family laws and women’s inheritance was undertaken with support of the Council of Islamic Ideology and messages on issues of child and forced marriages, women rights, birth registration and sexual harassment have also been telecast on public and private media channels.

Recently, the Senate passed the Maternity and Paternity Leave Bill, granting working women 6 months paid maternity leave and fathers up to 3 months paternity leave. For the first time the Sindh Police Rules have included 10 days paternity leave for their officers.

The Poverty Alleviation & Social Security Division has been created to set up poverty eradication policies with a focus on women. In this regard, various programmes have been supported such as the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Pakistan, Bait-ul-Mal, Zakat, Pakistan’s Poverty Alleviation Fund and the Ehsaas Programme.

The Benazir Income Support Programme has grown to become the largest cash transfer programme in Pakistan's history. It has disbursed Rs 691.5 billion as cash transfers to 5.8 million female beneficiaries.

Recently, the government also launched the Ehsaas Programme, aimed at extensive poverty reduction with 115 policy actions. The programme seeks to create precision safety nets to support the economic empowerment of women through tools such as big data and technology to promote financial inclusion and access to digital services.

Ehsaas' central focus is to develop human capital for poverty eradication. Under Ehsaas, the Kafaalat Programme has been allocated Rs. 200 billion to benefit 7 million deserving women across the nation. Women beneficiaries get Rs. 2,000 a month through bank accounts, they get rations from utility stores; and scholarships for schooling and cattle husbandry to become economically independent.

Women empowerment policies and legislation are also being instituted at the provincial level. In Kyber Pakhtunkwa, the government developed an Empowerment Policy Framework in 2015 and subsequently established Gender Mainstreaming Steering Committees. The Punjab Women Empowerment Package was established in 2012. Balochistan is in the process of developing a gender policy, and Sindh's Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Policy 2019 is in its final stages.

Madam Chair

The Government of Pakistan is committed to protect women from exploitation, from exclusion and marginalization. At the same time, it is endeavouring to provide women with equal opportunities and an enabling environment where they can grow and excel to their full potential.

Pakistan has made strides in developing and strengthening women centric policies. The government has put emphasis on gender parity through increased women's access to education, health care, economic opportunity and legal protection. But, we are also cognizant of critical obstacles and challenges in our path to gender equity. And, are working hard to ameliorate conditions for our women.

Today the Government of Pakistan reiterates its pledge towards gender parity, promotion and protection of women's rights. It appreciates national and

international bodies and organizations for working to create a conducive environment for women in our country.

Our delegation is delighted to be here and we welcome the opportunity to discuss and answer any questions you may have. I am confident that together, through constructive dialogue, we can work to make a better future for women in Pakistan and the world over.

Thank you