



Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN **Geneva**

National statement, delivered by Ambassador Tahir Hussain Andrabi, Deputy Permanent Representative, during Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Opinion at the 44th session of the Human Rights Council

(10 July 2020)

Madam President,

Pakistan shares the Rapporteur's concerns that the COVID virus can become a 'pathogen of repression' in the hands of opportunistic and authoritarian regimes.

In fact, grave concerns have also been highlighted by international media about the growing scale of human rights abuses in UN recognized situations of foreign occupation especially Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

As documented in the Report, India continues to impose arbitrary restrictions on internet connectivity, hindering Kashmiris, especially medical professionals' access to accurate and latest information on COVID.

During the first half of 2020 alone, the Indian occupation regime has pulled 'the kill switch' on internet for at least 55 times, throwing the entire region into an information black-hole.

Taking advantage of global pre-occupation with COVID, India has introduced a new regressive media policy, which rubber-stamps its censorship of and long-standing reprisals against Kashmiri journalists and media outlets.

Draconian laws like Public Safety Act and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) have been increasingly involved applied against journalists to penalize dissent and free speech espoused by renowned author Gowhar Gillani, photo-journalist Musarrat Zahra and news correspondent Peerzada Ashiq.

Only days ago, photograph of a tormented 3-year child, Ayad, sitting on the dead body of his grandfather Bashir Ahmed, murdered by Indian forces, was tweeted by BJP official Spokesman with remarks, quote "Pulitzer Lovers?" unquote, as a taunt to Pulitzer winner Kashmiri journalists.

This worrisome situation is further compounded by continued unlawful detention of political and human rights activists by India since last August, physical attacks on local reporters, denial of access to foreign media, physical and cyber-surveillance on the pretext of COVID, excessive use of force against peaceful protestors and summary execution of civilians.



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Cumulatively, this unparalleled assault on Kashmir human rights is being perpetrated to alter demographic composition of the disputed territory. The scale, gravity and systematic nature of atrocities constitute early warning signs of an imminent genocide by India in occupied J&K.

We urge the SR, this Council and the UN human rights machinery to closely monitor and report on the situation of Kashmiri people's basic rights and freedoms, including their fundamental freedom of expression and opinion.

I thank you.