



## Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN Geneva

### **National Statement, delivered by Ambassador Khalil Hashmi, Pakistan Permanent Representative, during Enhanced Interactive Dialogue with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on COVID-19, at the 45<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council**

**(15 September 2020)**

**Madam President,**

We thank the High Commissioner for her oral update on COVID-19.

Given its unprecedented and transnational public health, social and economic effects, COVID-19 pandemic represents an inflection point for us all.

Societies and States have a two-fold challenge to contend with: not only to regain the progress made in alleviating poverty, inequality, hunger and disease; but also to build back better for achieving the SDGs.

The disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on developing countries have shrunk their fiscal space and further exacerbated their debt burdens. These shocks will set back the ability of billions to realize and enjoy their human rights.

As the High Commissioner has pointed out, some States and non-state actors have used COVID pandemic as a cover to systematically violate human rights of the weak and vulnerable including on the basis of race, religion or belief.

One State in our region has done so to usurp the fundamental human rights of the people under illegal occupation, and stigmatized and incited violence against Muslim minority.

A safe and efficacious COVID vaccine represents the only effective guarantee against the pandemic. However, diminishing fiscal space and rising expenditures especially of the developing countries would constrain timely and affordable access to vaccines.

Advance COVID vaccine purchases by some runs the risk of locking out sufficient supply to millions in developing countries.

**Madam President,**

Amidst the devastating impact of COVID-19, Pakistan put its people at the centre of its response strategies. We prioritized policy interventions to strengthen public health response capacities, to alleviate poverty, improve nutrition, and support livelihoods.

Despite financial constraints, our Government announced in March an economic relief package of PKR 1200 billion (USD 8 billion) for administering a range of social protection programs and financial stimulus, at scale and with speed.



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The Government of Pakistan allocated PKR 203 billion (~USD 1.23 billion) for disbursement of one-time emergency cash assistance of \$75 to 16.9 million families at risk of extreme poverty. As of 31 August 2020, an amount of over PKR 177 billion has been disbursed to 14.6 million beneficiaries.

The emergency cash assistance, administered through the Ehsaas (Compassion) platform, was guided by social, financial and digital inclusivity, and governed by the principles of transparency and integrity of the eligibility and disbursement process.

More than 50 % of the beneficiaries were women; 5.6% from religious minorities (minorities population constitutes 3 % of the total population) and many of our transgender citizens. Several indirect relief measures were also channelled through businesses, industry and banks to sustain livelihoods, protect jobs and save lives.

From April to July 2020, as many as 250,000 stranded Pakistanis were flown back to the country. We created thousands of new jobs through tree plantation, mostly in rural settings, to help the unemployed informal workers especially women and youth.

To prevent transmission of the virus, we deployed the infrastructure built up over many years for polio. Community health workers were engaged for surveillance, contact tracing and care. A smart lockdown and deployment of trained health workers has helped flatten the curve.

Cumulatively, these steps demonstrate our efforts to create a strong foundation for the enjoyment of all human rights; to safeguard human dignity and realize the right to food, health, social security, decent work, and promote sustainable development.

### **Madam President,**

Protecting and realizing human rights for all in a post-COVID world would require a fundamental shift in approaches and priorities.

Globally, on the economic front, greater mobilization of international finance and liquidity would be required to mitigate the real risks of resurgence in poverty, hunger and disease.

On the public health front, affordable access by all to COVID-19 vaccine is essential. The vaccine must be declared a global public good. The principle of equity must be fully adhered to. Affordable vaccines must be made available first to those most in need and as supplies increase, to everyone, everywhere, based on the principle of needs, not the capacity to pay.

States have the primary responsibility to protect and promote human rights. Yet, addressing COVID related human rights concerns and mitigating their varied impact would require continued advocacy, monitoring, reporting, awareness raising and mobilization of global



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support, principally, by the Human Rights Council, the OHCHR and the Special Procedures Mandate Holders.

**Thank you.**