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The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan accredited to United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and with reference to latter's Note Verbale No. TESP/DD/HRESIS/JS/LG/KY dated 20 January 2021, has the honour to enclose the contribution from the Government of Pakistan for appropriate reflection in the report.

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan avails itself of the opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the assurances of its highest consideration.



Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Geneva

Pakistan's inputs pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution 44/2 entitled "central role of the State in responding to pandemics and other health emergencies, and the socioeconomic consequences thereof in advancing sustainable development and the realization of all human rights"

A- Human rights challenges experienced in responding to COVID 19 pandemic, including, in relation to the measures taken as part of the health response

COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated health, economic and social impacts across the world. Apart from massive loss of lives and livelihoods, the pandemic has disrupted economies, societies and healthcare systems, negatively affecting the enjoyment and realization of human rights.

2. The extent of these impacts has been disproportionately high on developing countries, perpetuating and exacerbating existing inequalities as well as high debt burdens, while shrinking the fiscal space. According to the World Bank, 88 to 115 million people will be pushed back to extreme poverty due to impacts of COVID pandemic¹. Additionally, ILO has estimated that labour markets around the world were disrupted in 2020 on a historically unprecedented scale resulting in loss of 255 million full-time jobs². Cumulatively, these challenges have eroded decades of development and poverty eradication gains, further eroding the ability of states to achieve the SDGs and hampering efforts to realize and enjoy human rights.

3. The negative socio-economic effects of COVID pandemic require globally coordinated measures that ease the economic and financial burden on developing countries, thereby creating conditions for all people to enjoy their rights and meet their needs.

Pakistan's experience

4. As a developing country with world's fifth largest population, the spread of COVID-19 presented a multitude of health, social and economic challenges. Despite financial constraints, the Government provided an economic relief package of 1.2 trillion PKR (equivalent to approximately US\$ 8 billion) aimed at alleviating poverty, hunger and malnutrition, providing social protection to the vulnerable, special incentives and support to businesses and workers.

5. Pakistan's COVID-19 response entailed a range of good practices, in full alignment with and support of rights, freedoms, dignity and needs of the people. The country was confronted with the following key human rights challenges, at national and sub-national levels:

i. Administrative Measures

6. Pakistan adopted the policy of smart lock-downs to contain the transmission of virus thus saving lives and allowing livelihoods, particularly of economically vulnerable people. In the immediate aftermath of COVID pandemic, the Government constituted the National Command

¹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity>

² https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf

and Operation Center (NCOC) at the federal level as a nerve center to synergize national efforts to combat the pandemic. All key stakeholders including provincial representatives remain members of the NCOC to monitor, prevent, mitigate and raise awareness about the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

ii. Health Services

7. The Government's health response to a global pandemic was robust aimed at providing emergency services and relief to all citizens through trained and well-equipped health force. To counter the spread of pandemic, separate COVID wards and temporary facilities were established across the country. To help the ordinary citizens, the Government also made available:

- a) Essential e-health services during the COVID pandemic including through telehealth services at public tertiary care facilities.
- b) Mobile Phone App for updating situation of Intensive Care Units (ICU) beds and ventilators.

8. Currently, Government's COVID vaccination programme has been rolled out with a focus on inoculating health workers, senior citizens and people with underlying conditions. The vaccination programme has, however, been severely affected by undue restrictions from export authorities of COVID vaccine supply with the aim to vaccinate senior citizens and healthcare workers.

iii. Livelihoods and Unemployment

9. Given the scale, urgency and complexity of the health, social and economic challenges, Pakistan launched an unprecedented social protection programme aimed at alleviating poverty, ensuring nutrition, safeguarding livelihoods and facilitating employment. Under the Ehsaas "Compassion" programme, different streams of emergency cash transfers, small business protections, nutritional support and microcredits continued to help women, children, disabled persons as well as people from religious minorities. Within the purview of the PKR 1.2 trillion economic stimulus package, the Government launched the largest social protection programme, comprising emergency cash handouts, labour protection schemes, and employment retention and generation incentives. More than 179 billion PKR were disbursed as emergency cash transfers to 14 million beneficiaries. In majority of the cases, cash was delivered to women in the family. 5.6% of the beneficiaries were from religious minorities (minorities population constitutes 3 % of the total population). Transgender citizens also benefitted.

10. To support workers in the informal sector, a web-portal was launched by the Prime Minister's Office, soliciting applications from those who had lost jobs due to the lockdown. Under this program, the Government is providing emergency cash of Rs. 12,000 to each affectee.

iv. Education

11. The Government of Pakistan has taken extensive measures to deal with the educational challenges during COVID pandemic. Radio and Television programmes were initiated to allow adolescents to continue their education at home during lockdown and to spend their time productively. Broadcast-based TV channel called Tele-School started from kindergarten to 12. All provincial education authorities have provided portals for facilitating online education of children.

v. Mitigating Hunger

12. Federal and provincial governments provided subsidies, food and nutrition to the large underprivileged population which was affected by COVID -19 pandemic and its economic impacts. For the provision of access to food as one of the fundamental rights, the Government introduced Ehsaas Langar (cooked food) Programme and Ehsaas Roshan (dry food) for the most vulnerable segment of the society including through Ehsaas Langar on Wheels (Food vans). To ensure uninterrupted supply of food, the Government enacted COVID-19 Prevention of Hoarding Ordinance 2020. In addition, Tiger Force, a group of volunteers, were established for distributing food ration to the vulnerable. To facilitate farmers, Agriculture Stimulus Package worth PKR 50 billion have been provided as subsidy on fertilizers, cotton seed, pesticides and sales tax.

vi. Countering Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

13. Federal and provincial Governments stepped up and undertook a number of noteworthy measures for combating GBV during the pandemic. Several GBV reporting helplines and referral pathways were established countrywide including the Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR)’s helpline 1099, (Punjab Commission of Status of Women (PCSW’s) helpline 1043, KPK’s BOLO helpline and Sindh WDD’s helpline 1094. Tele-psychosocial support services have been initiated for the female survivors of violence by provincial governments.

vii. Refugees

14. Pakistan is hosting about 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, holding Proof of Registration (PoR) as well as 0.84 million Afghan Citizenship cardholders and 0.6 unregistered Afghans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNHCR in collaboration with Government of Pakistan provided 36,000 vulnerable refugee families a one-off emergency cash payment of PKR 12,000. Efforts have been made in collaboration with different actors especially the civil society to provide social protection, healthcare facilities, food and other basic necessities during last year especially in the times of partial lockdowns. UNHCR is also operating special helplines to link refugees with medical facilities during COVID-19.

viii. Returning Migrant Workers

15. Around 200,000 Pakistani migrant workers became unemployed due to the impact of COVID-19. The Government facilitated the repatriation of around 412,000 people from abroad through 478 specially authorized flights. A web portal was launched to connect recently unemployed returning Pakistani migrant workers with employment opportunities abroad,

acquire certified training, and apply for financial assistance from the government.

ix. Detention Centers and Prisoners

16. Pakistan has taken several positive measures such as awareness campaigns regarding preventive measures from COVID pandemic in prisons across the country. Information, Education, and Communication materials in different languages and PPEs were provided to sensitize detainees, prison staff, and visitors. Steps have been taken for the release of vulnerable and pre-trial/remand detainees as well as women under trial and those convicted for petty crimes.

C- Any good or promising practices in these areas, including examples of international cooperation

17. COVID-19 pandemic has exposed existing vulnerabilities and inequalities within countries as well as in the global public health, economic and financial sectors. Socio-economic impacts of the pandemic have accentuated systemic global challenges of extreme poverty; inequality; liquidity crunch and external debts. Although the wider impacts are visible across the globe but the COVID induced economic recession has particularly constrained developing countries' capacities to meet socio-economic needs of their people and achieve progress towards 2030 Agenda.

18. This situation calls for greater international cooperation firstly to combat COVID pandemic through sharing of relevant expertise and technology especially related to COVID vaccine production and secondly averting socio-economic challenges through meaningful financial support and debt relief.

19. Pakistan continued to cooperate globally and provided anti-malaria drug chloroquine to dozens of countries in May 2020 which was seen helpful in addressing adverse symptoms of the COVID-19 pandemic. PPEs were provided both through government channels as well as by providing export licences to private companies to meet global needs. Pakistan received necessary equipment including testing kits and ventilators and most recently COVID vaccines from China.

20. The global demand for timely and affordable COVID vaccine has further highlighted the need for enhanced international cooperation. Yet, the goals of vaccine equity and universal vaccination remain unfulfilled in the face of undue export restrictions, advanced purchase agreement and resistance to grant waivers from vaccine patents. These measures undermine realization of enjoyment of social and economic rights especially the right to health.

21. Pakistan believes that availability of requisite financial resources is crucial in meeting COVID induced challenges, combating poverty and ensuring the realization of socio-economic rights including the rights to health and development. Unfortunately, severe liquidity crisis and the lack of progress towards generating sufficient finances for development could further erode countries' capacities to make socio-economic progress and achieve 2030 agenda. Additionally, burgeoning external debts are curtailing the abilities of developing countries to spare requisite resources to meet immediate development needs and withstand the impact of COVID pandemic.

22. In the spirit of providing debt relief for the developing world, Prime Minister of Pakistan had launched Global Initiative for Debt Relief for developing countries in April 2020. Similar other calls/initiatives were put forth by the UN Secretary General and individual States/organizations.

23. As all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interlinked, the international community must treat human rights in a fair and equal manner. In a spirit of collective responsibility to combat the pandemic, we need to work towards a meaningful global cooperation inter alia sharing of expertise; training of human resource; transfer of COVID vaccine technology; availability of financial resources and debt relief for the developing countries. There is a need for international cooperation to work on these ideas and proposals to firm up a comprehensive package for developing countries, which would allow these countries to spare resources to not only fulfil respective obligations in providing essential healthcare in the short term but also to fulfil agenda 2030, particularly in terms of goals no 1 (no poverty), 3 (good health and wellbeing), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 10 (reduced inequalities), 14 (life below water) & 15 (life on land).