



# General Assembly

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## Seventy-fifth session

Agenda item 119 (c) of the preliminary list\*

### **Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections: election of members of the Human Rights Council**

#### **Note verbale dated 18 June 2020 from the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

The Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations has the honour to refer to the candidacy of Pakistan for the Human Rights Council for the term 2021–2023 at elections to be held during the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly in New York.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution [60/251](#), the Permanent Mission of Pakistan has the further honour to transmit a document setting out the voluntary pledges and commitments made by Pakistan reaffirming its commitment to the promotion and protection of all human rights (see annex). Pakistan looks forward to contributing further by engaging proactively with the Human Rights Council, its entire machinery, processes and initiatives, as well as with the members of the international community, United Nations agencies and members of civil society.

The Permanent Mission would be grateful if the present note verbale and its annex were circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 119 (c) of the preliminary list.

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\* [A/75/50](#).



## **Annex to the note verbale dated 18 June 2020 from the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

### **Candidature of Pakistan to the Human Rights Council, 2021–2023**

#### **Voluntary pledges and commitments pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251**

1. Pakistan is a founding member of the Human Rights Council. As an active member of both the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council for three terms, Pakistan is seeking re-election to the Council for the term 2021–2023.
2. Pakistan attaches high importance to the work of the Human Rights Council. Pakistan's engagement with the Council has always been guided by its commitment to advance universal respect for all human rights for all peoples, based on the principles of impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity. If elected, Pakistan would continue to work towards strengthening dialogue, constructive engagement, consensus-building and international cooperation.
3. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251, following is a brief account of Pakistan's contributions, voluntary pledges and commitments in the field of human rights.

#### **Pakistan and human rights**

4. Pakistan has made consistent progress in promoting and protecting human rights at home and abroad. This commitment is rooted in our Constitution and driven by the imperative of our functional democracy, improved rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. These ideals are further guided by the vision of our founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who said, "We are the equal citizens of one State." The Constitution of Pakistan lays down the basic human rights framework by guaranteeing fundamental freedoms and civil and political rights and also provides for the progressive realization and enforcement of economic, social and cultural rights. This is supported by our efforts to strengthen the institutional framework for the realization of human rights at all levels.
5. Pakistan considers human rights as the bedrock of peaceful, inclusive and prosperous societies. It therefore accords high priority to advancing the mutually reinforcing objectives of development, human rights and democracy.

#### **Progress in the implementation of Pakistan's previous pledges**

6. Steady progress is being made across the entire spectrum of human rights, including as part of Pakistan's National Action Plan for Human Rights. This comprehensive plan consists of six thematic areas with 16 expected outcomes and 60 actions. The six thematic areas, which cover all human rights dimensions, include: (a) policy and legal reforms; (b) access to justice; (c) implementation of key human rights priorities; (d) international/United Nations treaty implementation; (e) establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions; and (f) an implementation and monitoring mechanism for the Action Plan.
7. Among other steps, under the National Action Plan, institutional mechanisms driven by data and research have been put in place that provide legal and financial assistance and redressal for infringements of rights. The helpline for legal assistance, 1099, continues to provide free legal aid.

8. A project on the establishment of the Human Rights Information Management System has been launched under the National Action Plan for scientific data collection and its technical analysis to monitor, evaluate and craft policy responses to the emerging human rights trends across Pakistan.

9. Conducting research to support informed decision-making is an important element of the National Action Plan. In this regard, a number of surveys have been carried out, including a research study on the legal framework of human rights in Pakistan.

### **Legal reforms**

10. Pakistan has made steady progress in enacting legislation, forging supportive institutionalization and strengthening policy-related actions for the promotion and protection of human rights consistent with the voluntary pledges that Pakistan undertook in the form of the National Action Plan. On the legislative front, key legislation promulgated includes:

(a) Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2020, to further safeguard the rights of children, especially early recovery of missing and abducted children;

(b) Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act, 2019, to provide legal, financial and added assistance for access to justice to the poor and vulnerable segments of society.

11. A set of other legislation targeting both economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights has reached the consideration stage of the National Assembly and/or the Senate. Notably, these include: (a) the Islamabad Capital Territory rights of persons with disability bill; (b) the torture, custodial death and custodial rape (prevention and punishment) bill, 2018; and (c) the Islamabad Capital Territory domestic violence (prevention and protection) bill, 2019.

12. Among the salient and recent pro-women laws are the National Commission on the Status of Women (Amendment) Act, 2018, anti-rape and anti-honour-killing laws and those relating to forced marriages, workplace harassment and the prevention of criminal incidents involving acid. The Board of Governors of the Women in Distress and Detention Fund has been reconstituted to enable it to deliver on its role and function. Women's participation in legislative and executive positions has progressively increased over the years. Seventy out of 342 members of the National Assembly and 20 out of 104 members of the Senate are women. Presently, four women are serving in the federal Cabinet, including a woman Minister for Human Rights.

13. Rights of the child remains one of the major areas of focus for Pakistan. To this end, the Government, during the past two years, has, inter alia, constituted a high-level consultative committee on child abuse and beggary, carried out implementation of the Juvenile Justice System Act and enacted the National Commission on the Rights of the Child Act, 2017. To take these legislative steps forward, Pakistan is now developing: (a) an action plan on child abuse; (b) minimum quality care standards for childcare institutions; (c) an inter-agency protocol on child abuse for childcare institutions at the level of the Islamabad Capital Territory; and (d) an awareness-raising campaign on the prevention of child abuse in schools.

14. Similarly, Pakistan has made positive strides in protecting the rights of the transgender community. In 2018, Pakistan's Parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, which allows transgender citizens to choose their gender and have it recognized on official documents, such as passports, national identity cards and driver's licences. In 2020, the Government launched a dedicated health scheme for the transgender community. A national committee for the

implementation of transgender persons (protection of rights) has also been constituted.

15. With respect to persons with disabilities and older people, three major steps have been taken: (a) a human rights survey on aged persons in Pakistan has been undertaken; (b) the National Council for Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been set up with a view to monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and laws and policies relating to the rights of persons with disabilities and chalking out follow-up actions on the Incheon Strategy; and (c) an Islamabad Territory senior citizen bill is also in advanced legislation stage.

16. Legislative measures are being taken to translate the constitutional guarantees of protection of rights of minorities into reality, such as the Hindu Marriage Act 2017.

### **Policy measures**

17. The Government is pursuing a people-centric approach to make Pakistan a “welfare State” and considers compassion, justice, the rule of law and the empowerment of women and girls as the cornerstones of its agenda to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals. The Prime Minister holds a vision to make “Naya Pakistan” (New Pakistan) and has introduced a flagship project called “Ehsaas” (Compassion) to eradicate poverty, with a special focus on women empowerment. The programme aims to target poverty, vulnerability, malnutrition and deprivation so that the fundamental rights of all citizens can be ensured. Steps are also being taken towards financial inclusion through policies that facilitate an investment-friendly environment and encourage sustainable and inclusive growth by investing in our human capital, empowering women and formalizing the undocumented economy.

18. In January 2020, the Government launched the “Hunarmand Jawan” programme – the country’s largest-ever skill development programme – aimed at youth empowerment through the provision of easy loans, professional capacity-building, supporting start-ups, and internships. This year, a major initiative for affordable housing for lower-income groups was launched.

19. Several steps were taken to mitigate the health, social and economic impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, while upholding and advancing the human rights of all throughout the country. Despite financial challenges, emergency cash assistance of \$900 million was provided to 12 million families, mostly women.

20. The Government of Pakistan has mainstreamed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its priorities are fully aligned with these objectives. Revitalizing the economy, youth employment, sustainable and affordable housing, institutional reforms, mitigating the effects of climate change, universal access to health services and education, ensuring food, energy and water security, access to clean drinking water and sanitation are some of the top priority areas of the new Government. Pakistan’s Parliament has the unique distinction of setting up the world’s first Sustainable Development Goals Implementation Unit (with its secretariat based in Parliament), with a particular focus on the implementation of goals and targets relating to human rights.

### **Ratification and implementation of international conventions**

21. Pakistan’s enduring commitment to the international human rights system dates back to the very beginning of the United Nations. During the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Begum Shaista Ikramullah from the Pakistan delegation played an active role in the inclusion of article 16 for the equal rights of men and women to marry and to found a family. The incorporation of women’s rights

into the Universal Declaration is a notable legacy that paved the way for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

22. Pakistan was also among the early signatories of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and played a leading role in the decolonization of many African States in the 1950s and 1960s. Pakistan was also one of the co-initiators of the 1990 World Summit for Children, which led to the adoption of the landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child. In keeping with this tradition, Pakistan co-facilitated the adoption of the resolution on the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child during the seventy-third session of the General Assembly.

23. Pakistan has ratified and continues to implement seven core international human rights treaties and two optional protocols. To achieve the purpose of grass-roots implementation, the Government has established treaty implementation cells at the federal and provincial levels to oversee compliance with these international instruments.

24. Pakistan has been regularly reporting to treaty bodies and Human Rights Council mechanisms. As a demonstration of its commitment to engagement and dialogue, Pakistan has thrice presented its human rights record in the universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council and is following up on the recommendations. Since 2016, Pakistan has engaged intensely with the United Nations treaty bodies and presented its periodic implementation reports (i.e. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). Pakistan also presented its first voluntary national review on the status of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in July 2019 and submitted its report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in October 2019. Pakistan also continues to actively engage with the special procedures.

#### **National human rights institutions**

25. Established in line with the Paris Principles, Pakistan has established an autonomous National Commission for Human Rights. It continues to discharge its wide-ranging mandate, encompassing all aspects of human rights, including pursuing submitted complaints of alleged human rights violations.

26. The National Commission on the Status of Women and has been further strengthened and has helped in the establishment of provincial commissions.

27. The National Children Committee is working under the umbrella of the Federal Ombudsman of Pakistan and with commissioners in all four provinces and Islamabad to protect children's fundamental rights and to provide them with an enabling environment for their development. Work is under way for the establishment of a dedicated national commission for children.

28. Further strengthening of the National Commission on Minorities is under way through administrative and financial empowerment measures. The Government is also working on a national interfaith harmony policy. An expert working group on the preparation of an action plan against religious persecution has been constituted.

**Voluntary pledges and commitments***At the national level*

29. Pakistan makes the following voluntary pledges that it will:

(a) Continue to consolidate progress made in the past and strive for the full realization, enjoyment, advancement and protection of economic, social, political, civil and cultural rights;

(b) Continue with sustained implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan, with a special focus on strengthening mechanisms and tools for redressal of human rights concerns;

(c) Continue to consider and implement recommendations from the universal periodic review mechanism as well as those from the United Nations treaty bodies and further strengthen treaty implementation cells;

(d) Continue steps towards the further strengthening and empowering of the national human rights institutions;

(e) Strengthen parliamentary oversight, at the national and provincial levels, over human rights policies and their implementation;

(f) Strengthen the system for the provision of free legal aid to the victims of human rights violations, in accordance with the law;

(g) Preserve, promote and strengthen freedoms of the press, communication, assembly, expression or opinion, religion or belief, consistent with our national and international obligations;

(h) Continue to enhance civil society's role and participation in promoting and protecting all human rights, with a special emphasis on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(i) Continue to provide capacity-building, training programmes and education related to human rights to parliamentarians, law enforcement officials, judges, public prosecutors, lawyers, civil servants and the media;

(j) Continue to foster a pro-people development agenda, with particular attention to women, children, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities, transgender persons and other vulnerable sections of the population;

(k) Continue to widen the coverage of the social safety nets, and women and youth empowerment programmes, such as Ehsaas and Hunarmand Jawan;

(l) Continue to protect the rights of minorities and promote further interfaith harmony;

(m) Strengthen efforts to promote and protect the rights of workers and progressively realize decent working conditions across all sectors of the economy;

(n) Continue to promote inclusive and universal education;

(o) Further strengthen the legal and policy frameworks for the elimination of violence as well as discrimination against women, children and vulnerable groups in society;

(p) Continue efforts for promoting gender equality and women empowerment;

(q) Continue to undertake meaningful measures to prevent the sexual exploitation and abuse of children;

(r) Continue work towards the development of policies and programmes for countering hate speech.

*At the international level*

30. Pakistan will:

(a) Continue to strive for the realization of the vision to transform the Human Rights Council into a genuine global platform for dialogue and cooperation, on the principles of non-discrimination, impartiality and universality;

(b) Engage in debates to promote efficiency, reform and effectiveness in the work of the Human Rights Council, based on its institution-building package;

(c) Strengthen its constructive engagement and cooperation with other members of the Human Rights Council to make it an effective body;

(d) Continue to support the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in fulfilling its mandate through advocacy, financial contribution and political support;

(e) Continue to participate in the universal periodic review mechanism and follow up on the recommendations received during previous cycles;

(f) Continue to promote engagement, dialogue and cooperation with the States and civil society in addressing “situations of concern” in the Human Rights Council;

(g) Promote the realization of the right to development as an inalienable right for all peoples and individuals, and support ongoing efforts to develop the concept and its operationalization;

(h) Support efforts at combating climate change at the national and international levels and mitigating the human rights impact of climate change on climate-vulnerable communities;

(i) Raise awareness about the undeniable links between corruption, lack of development and human rights. Continue to work towards strengthening international cooperation on the return of stolen assets to the countries of origin and combating illicit financial flows, which remains crucial for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as they adversely impact the enjoyment of basic human rights;

(j) Continue to promote a culture of peace, take collective measures against racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia and protect victims from such crimes;

(k) Continue to participate in the international discourse towards better implementation of global compacts on migration and refugees in order to develop a just and equitable global regime on human mobility;

(l) As the Coordinator of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for Human Rights, continue to help build bridges and overcome divergences in the work of the Human Rights Council;

(m) Continue to play an active and constructive role in maintaining consensus on Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, entitled “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief”; work with relevant States and other stakeholders for enhanced implementation of resolution 16/18 and its action plan (Istanbul Process); host the next meeting of the Istanbul Process in Pakistan;

(n) Continue to support the activities of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations for promoting a culture of dialogue, tolerance and peaceful cooperation among the nations of the world;

(o) Continue to share best practices, lessons learned and challenges faced in implementing the human rights agenda at the national level in a spirit of mutual learning;

(p) Continue to strengthen cooperation with the special procedures, including by arranging visits of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the special rapporteurs.

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