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**Opening Statement by the Head of Delegation
to introduce the National Report**

(28th Session of the UPR Working Group)

**13 November 2017, Geneva**

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Assalaam o alaikum and good morning,

 It is indeed a privilege and honour for me to introduce Pakistan’s national report at this Universal Periodic Review (UPR). I wish to thank you all for your participation in today’s session.

2. Next year will mark completion of the first decade of the UPR mechanism. In last nine years, the mechanism has progressed smoothly to achieve universal acclaim. By extending equal treatment to all States, it has reduced selectivity and discrimination. Preserving this cooperative mechanism is a shared interest of all Member States of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

3. Pakistan remains committed to promoting human rights both within the country and internationally. Our democratic struggle against colonialism, which culminated in the creation of Pakistan in 1947, was galvanized by the ideals of fundamental freedom and human dignity. These ideals inspired our newly independent country to be amongst the first signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the eve of its adoption in 1948. As a founding member of the Human Rights Council and during our previous terms as members, Pakistan has actively contributed to the work of the Council. I am gratified that in elections held last month at the United Nations General Assembly, more than 150 countries voted for Pakistan to become member of the Human Rights Council for the term 2018-20. We deeply value this global support and endorsement.

4. Pakistan has adopted consensual and cooperative approaches in the work of the United Nations. We have acted as a bridge builder across different groups and varying interests. As Chair of the OIC Group on Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva, Pakistan has endeavored to reconcile the divergences in positions and perspective of the Islamic World and the West. We have promoted consensus on the most contentious and challenging issues in the Human Rights Council. We will continue to do so in the future.

Mr. President,

5. Pakistan values this UPR exercise and we look forward to an open and constructive dialogue on our work in the area of human rights. I offer my special thanks to the “Troika” -- Egypt, Iraq and Latvia, for facilitating our review.

6. Pakistan’s Third UPR Report was prepared through an extensive and inclusive process involving all relevant stakeholders including a range of civil society organizations and academia. I wish to place on record my gratitude to all those who contributed in this endeavor.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. In line with the vision of our founding father Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan is a democratic, pluralistic and progressive State. Pakistanis aspire for a society that is based on equality, the rule of law, respect for diversity, and justice. In Pakistan of today, a thriving national consensus exists that all our aspirations can be achieved by adhering to the Constitution. The faith of our people in the Federation and the Constitution has consolidated roots of democracy in the country. In the last four years, Pakistan’s democracy has flourished with an elected and sovereign parliament, an independent judiciary, a free media and a vibrant civil society

8. An independent Election Commission is the bedrock of any democratic foundation. Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is being strengthened through a Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reforms. Just last month, our Parliament adopted a comprehensive Electoral Reforms Act. ECP is itself taking initiatives to maximize women participation both as voters and as representatives. ECP’s other initiatives like voter education especially for persons with disabilities; recruitment of more women in ECP staff and gender sensitization sessions are widening the base of participatory democracy.

9. Despite having a vocal and robust parliamentary opposition, our government can rightly pride itself for not harboring any political prisoners, ensuring civil liberties for all including human rights defenders and, above all, freedom of media in reporting and analysis of the events.

10. Our Government considers media as a partner in raising public awareness on human rights and fundamental freedoms. The right to freedom of opinion and expression is close to our hearts. The “Right to Information” is now guaranteed by the Constitution as a fundamental right.

11. Our Civil Society is proving its resilience as whistle blower on matters relating to accountability, transparency and certain societal attitudes. Similarly our independent judiciary and the legal community have asserted their role in upholding the rule of law and ensuring the protection of constitutional rights of all citizens. Taken together, their concerted actions go a long way in helping the Government to safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms of all citizens of Pakistan.

Mr. President,

12. Real commitment of any government for the cause of human rights needs to be contextualized in the given domestic environment. The human rights record of any country cannot be assessed in isolation of the ground situation.

13. In the past fifteen years, terrorism and extremism not only endangered our national security and social fabric but also jeopardized the human rights of our citizens. Terrorists targeted hospitals, schools, shrines, mosques, and other places of worship. This created an environment of intimidation for law enforcements officials, members of judiciary, journalists, religious minorities and civil society activists.

14. As a subset of these fifteen difficult years, the reporting period of UPR (2012 to 2016) marked a critical turnaround in terms of progress in security and terrorism. In December 2014, following barbaric terrorist attack on a public school in Peshawar, Pakistan undertook decisive counterterrorism measures. On one hand, our security forces launched targeted operations against terrorists’ hideouts in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) bordering our western frontiers. One the other hand, our civil administration and judiciary worked overtime to bring terrorists and extremists to justice through due legal process. After nearly three years of our targeted campaign, I am gratified to report that we have turned the corner against terrorism in Pakistan. We have cleared FATA from terrorists, while their remnants elsewhere in the country are on the run.

15. Successful military operation in FATA also enabled the Government to undertake much needed administrative, judicial and security reforms in FATA through a high powered Cabinet Committee. Parallel to FATA reforms, the Government has also ensured smooth return and rehabilitation of temporarily dislocated civilian population of FATA. As we speak, almost all of dislocated people of FATA have returned home.

16. A consequence of our challenges in counterterrorism is the implementation of Death Penalty. Government of Pakistan had imposed a voluntary moratorium on death penalty for a number of years. Mounting public pressure in the wake of Peshawar School attack forced the government to lift this moratorium. We impose death penalty in line with Constitution, and in consonance with international norms, only in the “most serious crimes” Due process of law and fair trial standards are being followed in full earnest.

17. Our counterterrorism measures are in full respect and compliance of international law. Despite the enormity of challenges, Pakistani law enforcement agencies have maintained high standards of professional conduct and uphold human rights in dealing with militants.

18. Pakistan has made extraordinary efforts and sacrifices to eradicate the scourge of terrorism and build a peaceful and stable region. To date we have lost nearly 10,000 thousand Pakistani soldiers and policemen, and around 50,000 civilians. The total economiccost for Pakistan over the last decade has been around 75 billion dollars. These losses have not dented our resolve to eliminate terrorism. With support of its resilient people and valiant security forces, Pakistan will INSHALLAH succeed in this campaign. We ask our partners in the international community to be mindful of our challenges, respect our resolve and support our efforts.

Mr. President,

19. Besides progress in counterterrorism, we ensured steady mainstreaming of human rights in overall policy priorities and national discourse. Let me briefly touch upon some of the key areas of this progress which are in line with a number of recommendations in our last UPR. I wish to highlight seven key institutional and policy developments:

1. We have set up a separate and independentMinistry of Human Rights.
2. We have also established Provincial Human Rights Departments with Human Rights Committees at district-level.
3. Parliamentary oversight on human rights is being ensured by Senate and National Assembly’s Standing Committees on human rights.
4. National Commission on Human Rights is working on its mandate enabled by an Act of Parliament in May 2015. The province of Sind has created its own Provincial Human Rights Commission while work is ongoing to replicate this in other provinces.
5. National Commissions on Status of Women is working with complete administrative and financial autonomy enabled by NCSW Act 2012.
6. Work on Separate National Commissions on Children and Rights of Minorities is progressing well. The National Assembly has approved National Commission on the Rights of Children Bill, 2017.
7. Pakistan has launched the historic National Action Plan on Human Rights in February 2016. The 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, Legal Reforms; (b) Access to Justice; (c) Implement Key Human Rights priorities; (d) International/UN Treaty implementation; (e) Establish and strengthen national human rights institutions; and (f) Implement and Monitor mechanism for the Action Plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. In the last four years, Pakistan has taken important legislative measures to meet its international human rights obligations. We ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in November 2016.

21. Pakistan continues to regularly report to the relevant Treaty Bodies on the implementation of these conventions. Since May 2016 following of Pakistan’s periodic reports have been reviewed by the relevant bodies:

1. Convention on the Rights of the Child;
2. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,
3. Convention against Torture;
4. Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and
5. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Mr. President,

22. The Government is paying special attention to protection of the rights of other vulnerable groups including children and minorities. Let me elaborate our actions to promote human rights of minorities.

23. Pakistan is a land of many religions and beliefs whose followers have lived in peace and harmony for centuries. Minorities have the Constitutional right to freely profess their religion and visit their places of worship. A case in point is the flourishing Christian Missionary Schools system in Pakistan where even the most devout Muslims send their children for education. Unfortunately, the reality of tolerant pluralistic Pakistan is muddled by news of violence perpetrated by terrorists and extremists.

24. An undeniable fact of history is that global fault lines of the Cold War and ideological competition among foreign powers have traveled to our country, creating forces of extremism and sectarianism. These evil forces target people of all faiths and beliefs. Except for a small extremist fringe, overwhelming majority of Pakistan does not subscribe to an extremist agenda. We are taking steps to further neutralize this extremist fringe.

25. Our Government is also taking serious actions against hate speech, which leads to instances of allegations of blasphemy and religious discrimination. For instance, Punjab Sound System Regulation Act, 2015 is a useful initiative, which is being successfully implemented to eliminate the use of loud speakers for incitement to hatred. Punjab Vigilance Committee Act, 2016 provides the establishment of vigilance committees at the district and provincial level, which are mandated to report any unlawful activity being carried out, or being planned, with respect to incitement. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Commissioners and Police formations have been directed to exhibit zero tolerance to hate speech and publicity material. Strict action has been taken in different districts of Balochistan and Sindh. We remain committed to further improving our response to incitement to hate or violence.

Mr. President,

26. We agree that all human rights are equal, indivisible, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. However, for a developing country like Pakistan, economic and social rights are of paramount importance. We are convinced that realization of these rights will help realize a whole range of human rights, including civil and political rights.

27. We have also strengthened social protection networks like Central Zakat Fund and Pakistan Bait-ul Mal (PBM), which provide subsistence allowance to poor widows, orphans, disabled and the unemployed and supported their medical treatment. The micro-credit financing scheme, Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) continues to provide immediate relief to women of low-income families enabling them to absorb the shock of rising prices of food and fuel.

Mr. President,

28. We believe that promotion and protection of human rights is among the primary responsibilities of the Government. We also remain mindful that promotion and protection of human rights is a continuous process that must be reinforced by strengthening democratic institutions with the support of civil society and media. Our government has endeavoured to promote human rights as a means to fulfill our electoral promise of improving lives and livelihoods of our people. In the run up to the elections next years, I am certain that the Federal and Provincial Governments in Pakistan would redouble their efforts to implement respective human rights measures and policies.

29. Pakistan wishes to thank the delegations for their advanced questions, which the Pakistan delegation will try to respond during this interactive dialogue. We look forward to a productive and constructive discussion, which would help us to better promote and protect human rights in the country.

 I thank you.

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