

**Remarks during the 42nd UPR Session for Senator Walid Iqbal,**

**Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights**

**30 January 2023**

**Mr. President,**

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished delegates,**

I am honored to participate in the 4th review of Pakistan’s National Report under the Universal Period Review (UPR).

 As a legal practitioner, public representative, legislator, and Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, I remain deeply involved with protecting and advancing the human rights agenda in Pakistan.

 We believe that human rights are inherent to all human beings and that everyone is equally entitled to them without discrimination. Human rights are interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible and Pakistan’s Constitution guarantees fundamental freedoms to all without any discrimination.

 Pakistan is a vibrant democracy. We are also undergoing the process of strengthening of human rights institutions at all levels. As is the case in all parliamentary democracies, parliament is the key institution and the apex body to safeguard the fundamental human rights of citizens.

Pakistan has a robust system of Standing and Functional Committees of both houses of the parliament, which scrutinize the legislative processes and ensure that every law enacted conforms to the fundamental rights enshrined in our 1973 Constitution and that it is also in line with our international human rights obligations.

Legislatures represent the masses, shape laws, and exercise a degree of oversight or control over the executive through the standing committees of the parliament, which serve as a vehicle for improving the standards of probity, efficiency, and responsiveness in the administration of laws and holding the executive accountable for its actions and inactions.

Through its convening power, these Committees have regularly engaged in healthy dialogue with the Executive on wide ranging human rights matters in the country.

**Mr. President,**

This system of parliamentary oversight is replicated in the case of all four provinces, where the respective provincial Standing Committees on Human Rights and Minorities Affairs scrutinize the provincial legislative processes and hold the provincial administration accountable.

 In addition to these constitutional forums, there are several voluntary organizations and national human rights mechanisms where our legislators participate and find ways to further the human rights agenda in the country.

 One such example is the Parliamentarians’ Commission for Human Rights, a voluntary organization comprising members of Pakistan’s parliament from all the major political parties and all four provinces. This body endeavors to ensure that the parliamentarians use their distinctive role to complement and strengthen the work of human rights activists throughout the country; and use parliamentary practices such as questions, call attention notices, adjournment motions, and resolutions, to draw the government’s attention to human rights issues. Parliamentary Commission of Pakistan has played an active role in pushing for Police Reforms with a focus on gender equality and women empowerment.

**Mr. President,**

 It is a matter of great personal pride and collective accomplishment that since the last UPR, our parliament has enacted several laws and made significant amendments to the existing legislation to align them with our national and international obligations and, more particularly, in light of the recommendations received during the UPR review in 2017.

I would highlight some of the critical areas in which we have been successful in enacting legislation since 2017 include minorities’ rights, the juvenile justice system, protection of transgender persons, protection of underage girls, enforcement of women’s property rights, safeguarding the rights of the disabled persons, protection of journalists and media professionals, protection against torture and custodial death and strengthening the safeguards for women against harassment.

**Mr. President,**

 In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the commitment of Pakistan’s parliamentarians towards the cause of promotion and protection of human rights in our country. I thank everyone for their constructive feedback. We will give due consideration to the recommendations received today, and try to implement them in light of our legal, constitutional, and democratic obligations.

Thank you.

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