

**STATEMENT BY SECRETARY**

**MINISTRY OF HUMAN RIGHTS, Mr. Ali Raza Bhutta**

**Mr. President,**

 The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs has outlined numerous institutional, legislative, and policy actions undertaken by Pakistan in pursuance of its human rights obligations and commitments.

 As the Federal Secretary of the Ministry of Human Rights, I will briefly share an overview of some of the policies and institutional measures devised to further our national human rights agenda.

We updated the existing National Action Plan for Human Rights in 2020 with a view to making it more comprehensive and addressing any previous gaps. The revision was based on a comprehensive research study in 2018 aimed at identifying gaps in legislation and proposing reforms to ensure cohesiveness with international commitments in the human rights framework of Pakistan.

This Action Plan provides a strategic framework for introducing human rights interventions in six thematic areas. It mainly focuses on policy intervention, legal reform, capacity building of stakeholders, including human rights in the curriculum at various levels, remedy mechanisms, financial assistance to victims, and public awareness campaigns.

The Ministry of Human Rights also launched an Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (BHR) in December 2020 to ensure human rights due diligence in the business sector. Sixty-nine actions have been identified under eight priority areas for legislative and policy reforms to ensure protection, respect, and access to remedy in the business sector.

Last year, in consultations with other stakeholders, the government developed a National Policy Framework on Human Rights. The main aim of the policy is to promote human rights by focusing on legal reforms, institutional development, and capacity building of stakeholders about the rights of vulnerable groups.

 A Model Policy on Violence Against Women has also been drafted in consultation with UN agencies and civil society organizations.

**Excellencies and distinguished delegates,**

We have taken concrete measures to implement these human rights policy frameworks. I want to cite two examples owing to time constraints.

In 2020, we launched a Human Rights Awareness Program (HRAP) to educate and sensitize the public and office bearers about international human rights commitments and our follow-up actions.

We have also established a 24/7 Helpline to provide legal advice, counseling, assistance, and referral services to redress human rights grievances. The Helpline has received 1.4 million calls since its inception in 2015. More than 50,000 callers were provided with legal advice and referral services. A mobile app for the helpline was also launched in 2020. A special app on Prime Minister Delivery Unit connected to the helpline was also introduced in 2022 to support the transgender community. Such Helplines have also been established in the provinces.

**Mr. President,**

Providing affordable and speedy justice has also been an area of priority for us. To provide legal and financial assistance to the needy victims of human rights violations, the Government has established Legal Aid and Justice Authority (LAJA). The Authority has registered more than 500 lawyers on a pro bono basis.

Several prisoners have been released after paying fines and submitting bail bonds in addition to legal aid in filing bail petitions through pro bono lawyers during jail visits.

A fund has also been established to provide financial assistance to prisoners languishing in jails due to nonpayment of the judicially determined compensation to the affected families and victims. During the last two years, 25 million rupees have been paid to release 26 prisoners. Moreover, Rs.8 million was allocated under Human Rights Relief Fund during the last two years, and 371 victims were provided financial relief.

**Mr. President,**

As part of our effort to develop data-driven policy interventions and strengthen the implementation framework, a Human Rights Management and Information System (HRIMS) was established at the Federal and Provincial levels in 2021 for data collection on human rights indicators regularly. HRIMS is a secure data management system based on international best practices on the Human Rights-Based Approach to Data.

Similarly, a National Monitoring Reporting and Follow-up System (NMRF) has been put in place at the Federal level for coordination with the Provincial Governments for reporting on international conventions, UPR, and SDGs related to human rights.

In terms of oversight of human rights, Pakistan has independent commissions, as the Minister pointed out, parliamentary oversight, and a special human rights cell in the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

We look forward to the recommendations and will give them due consideration for implementation in line with our constitutional and legal framework.

Thank you.