



## Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN Geneva

### **National statement, delivered by Mr. Junaid Suleman, Second Secretary, at the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the Forum on Minority Issues**

*Theme: Hate Speech, Social Media and Minorities*

**(19-20 November 2020)**

Madam Chair,

Pakistan welcomes the salient contemporary theme for this year's Forum.

Societies have long grappled with intolerance, exclusion and violence targeting minorities. However, wide misuse of social media platforms has played the proverbial role of 'adding fuel to the fire'.

Now, with a single click, hate-based ideologies, racist propaganda, and dehumanizing messages can reach millions of people in few seconds, accentuating biases, precipitating xenophobia, and reinforcing stereotypes.

This seamless connectivity coincides with a disturbing inflection point in the history.

Today, populism has become the currency of politics.

The unmitigated use of incendiary rhetoric for electoral gains has found amplification through both mainstream and social media.

More worryingly, in certain cases, public leaders and State machinery are themselves complicit in inciting violence against minorities.

This has bred a culture of impunity, as xenophobic narratives continue to rage online, putting human rights of minorities at heightened risk, and weakening social cohesion and harmony.

In our neighboring country, the world has witnessed the human rights impact of these sobering trend-lines. In late February 2020, over three dozen Muslims were murdered, and hundreds wounded in its national capital in broad daylight at the hands of right-wing individuals.

These horrendous acts of violence, carried over a course of three days and with full State sanction, were triggered by hate speech of one of the ruling party leaders.

Madam Chair,

Another systemic issue is the prioritization by social media companies of profitability over



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human rights principles and responsibilities. According to media reports, Facebook chose not to remove hateful posts by several ultra-nationalist ruling leaders in one country of our region to safeguard its business interests.

The lack of independent oversight mechanisms; increased use of algorithm-based decision making processes; and absence of uniform and standardized content moderation policies among social media companies have also added to the complexity of the challenge before us.

Advocacy for reasonable regulations is often stonewalled in defense of freedom of expression and opinion.

This has in turn stalled progress in crafting sensible multidisciplinary and multi- stakeholder response measures against the growing impact and scale of the problem of proliferating hate speech.

The ‘hate pandemic’, in the wake of the COVID emergency, has once again highlighted the urgency to address the drivers and platforms that are used as vehicles to promote hatred against minorities.

We hope the discussions at the Forum address these complex but necessary debates to both protect freedom of speech and combat hate speech; foster tolerance; make online spaces safe; and close protection gaps for individuals and groups vulnerable to real-time, human consequences of this scourge.

I thank you.