



National statement delivered by Mr. Sumair Gul, Second Secretary, during the Interactive Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteurs on the Independence of Judges and Lawyer at the 47th session of Human Rights Council

28 June 2021

Madam President,

We thank the Rapporteur for his detailed presentation.

Pakistan echoes the Rapporteur's viewpoint that States should strive to curtail the impacts of COVID-related restrictions on the functioning of judiciary.

It is important for courts to continue their work independently and to uphold rule of law amidst a pandemic, which bears serious human rights implications.

Mindful of this fact, Pakistan has devised guidelines, which are aimed to maintain a functioning judiciary while containing the spread of virus. The courts have been encouraged to prioritize hearing of important and urgent cases, and consider provision of interim relief measures in others.

The landmark decision of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in February 2021, imposing death penalty ban for individuals with mental health conditions, demonstrates that these guidelines have facilitated administration of justice even during these challenging times.

With the improvement in local epidemiological situation, several district courts and tribunals have now also resumed normal working. In-person hearings are being carried out in strict adherence to WHO's physical and sanitary guidelines.

As rightly pointed out in the Report, the COVID pandemic has laid bare the fact that growing digital divide within and among countries has a justice dimension to it. Due to shrinking fiscal space, developing countries face resources constraints to make timely arrangements for conducting virtual court proceedings. We, therefore, call for greater global cooperation, resource mobilization and sharing of best practices in bridging the digital divide, as an imperative of ensuring effective and timely administration of justice. Thank you.