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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities (HRCBM), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Opposition to Women's Rights in Pakistan

Since 2018, to celebrate the occasion of International Women's Day, a march is conducted annually across major cities in Pakistan by women's rights activists, known as the "Aurat March" (women's march). The event has continued to face opposition from political groups in Pakistan dominated by the religious right.

While the rest of the world celebrates women's day by devising strategies consistent with the liberal ethos of modern society to improve the conditions of women, Pakistani women to this day continue to face the challenge of whether or not they will even be allowed to raise issues on a public forum.

Pakistan's minister for religious affairs Noorul Haq Qadri even demanded that the country mark March 8 as 'Hijab Day' to oppose the march. False allegations and social media disinformation campaigns are being used to try and discredit the event, such as photo-shopped placards which distorted the messages. Last year's march saw one of the worst examples of this: a doctored video of the Karachi march was circulated making it seem as if the participants had committed "blasphemy" – a charge that in Pakistan can lead to the accused being killed by vigilantes.

This year as well, the Lahore administration refused to provide any security and held a meeting to persuade women activists not to march, stating that it would create a law and order situation. The organisers had to move the High Court to seek appropriate remedies – a step they had to take in 2020 as well. The Constitution of Pakistan grants the freedom to hold and organise peaceful processions under Article 16, 17 and 19, despite which women are met with opposition to even hold a peaceful march.

Women face challenges across the globe. The Muslim world presents a unique case, where religion plays an important role in the public sphere. The opposition to Aurat March is also largely on religious grounds. We hope that women in Pakistan are allowed to voice their opinion in an atmosphere free from violence oppression and intimidation and can stand with the world in demanding equality in all spheres of life in Pakistan.

South Asian Minorities Collective, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.