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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 Nord-Sud XXI - North-South XXI, 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.

[22 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.



Continuing human rights concerns over regressive blasphemy laws in Pakistan

On 19th January, 2022, a 26-year old woman was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment and death by hanging by a criminal court in Pakistan. The court convicted Aneeqa Ateeq under Pakistan's controversial and regressive blasphemy laws.

The blasphemy laws in Pakistan have invited international ire on many previous occasions, yet the Government of Pakistan, through its organs, including the judiciary, continues to actively enforce these provisions contained in the Pakistan Penal Code. More recently, through the enactment of 'The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA)' in 2016, the State has acquired greater powers to reinforce the draconian blasphemy regime in the cyber-arena. Ateeq's conviction and death sentence continues the trend of social media policing through blasphemy laws, as the offence is alleged to have been committed over the social media communication app, WhatsApp.

While Ateeq's conviction and death sentence is subject to confirmation by a higher court, blasphemy laws and their invocation renders the accused vulnerable to mob/vigilante justice. As a result, apart from misuse of police power, blasphemy laws expose undertrials and their families to ostracization, and in worse cases, infliction of violence leading to death. These laws are also frequently abused and misused to settle personal scores between private parties, by the Government to curb free speech and to curtail the rights of Hindu and Christian minorities in Pakistan.

Ateeq's case is a stark reminder of the urgent need for this Council to intervene in this grim situation of human rights being violated with abandon. Our organization beseeches the Council to call upon Pakistan for immediate repeal of blasphemy laws under the Pakistan Penal Code as well as under the PECA. Consequently, Pakistan ought to be called upon to immediately suspend all executions, convictions, trials and investigations under blasphemy laws.
