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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by The Organization for Poverty Alleviation and Development, 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.

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* 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.



Human Rights Situation in South Asia

The past year was a difficult one for South Asia, which witnessed more than its fair share of violence and troubles. Some of the visuals from the region that have filled screens across the world have been nothing short of harrowing. It was equally a bad year for democracy and human rights as the tendency towards authoritarianism and intolerance of dissent found free expression through much of the region. While several of these trends deserve separate interventions in their own right, the grim situation in two countries –Afghanistan and Myanmar – overshadow them. This submission, therefore, is intended to draw attention to the plight of the people of these two countries and to the disruptive, highly damaging, and self-serving role that countries such as China and Pakistan have been playing. It is also aimed at underlining how ineffectual and uncaring the international community appears to have become to widespread violations of human rights.

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan from a war-weary international coalition last summer was, for many, a bitter pill to swallow. Since then, the victorious Taliban have begun to reveal and express their true selves, belying past claims of being a softened and less conservative version of their earlier selves. They have established a repressive, autocratic State that has carried out hundreds of targeted killings and abductions of former Afghan officials. They have dismantled the Election Commission of Afghanistan as they see no role for the people of Afghanistan in the governing of Afghanistan. They have silenced local journalists, prevented girls from attending school and banned women from many workplaces, ordered women not to venture out without a male chaperone, and whipped female protesters in the streets.

Even as they took these draconian steps, the Taliban excelled in demonstrating that they actually had no clue on how a country ought to be run. The Afghan economy is in shambles and a humanitarian crisis is brewing. Reports have projected that over twenty million Afghans are on the brink of starvation and that the country's rudimentary healthcare system is on the verge of collapse. No country is willing to recognize or do business with a bunch of terrorists who suppress their own people. Not even Pakistan, the primary promoter of the Taliban, is willing to accord recognition, although it has been liberally proffering the unsolicited advice to the rest of the world that they accept the Taliban and hold it in an embrace. Pakistan's advice has been that the international community first cuddles up to the Taliban and then uses the resulting warmth and influence to entice the Taliban to change its medieval ways and begin treating its citizens, especially its women, as human beings. Why Pakistan, quite obviously the Taliban's main benefactor, cannot get the terrorist outfit to first mend its ways and only then aspire to be accepted, is moot.

No country has mastered how to misuse and exploit terrorism the way Pakistan has. Yet the country has never figured on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. It has dodged that by repeatedly creating situations like in present-day Afghanistan and then exploiting such situations by projecting itself to needy interlocutors as the only country in a position to help rectify the situation. The Taliban have been sheltered, nurtured and strengthened by Pakistan for all these years with the singular objective of getting them back in power in Kabul after ousting the international coalition. The more senior and influential terrorist leaders were sheltered by Pakistani intelligence agencies in mansions in Pakistan's main cities, not in caves and huts along the border. Simply put, without Pakistan there would be no Taliban. Without the Pakistani intelligence agencies driving the movement, tens of thousands of deeply radicalized and heavily armed Taliban fighters would not have descended upon Afghanistan from Pakistan once the United States of America's departure was announced. Without Pakistan, Kabul would not have fallen so quickly to the Taliban. A lot of the ire and indignation at the Taliban and its barbaric ways, therefore, should also be directed towards Pakistan.

The role that Pakistan played in shaping both the radical ideas of the Taliban in religious seminaries in north-western Pakistan and the fate of the terrorist group through steadfast support to its violent ways has been well documented. That the Taliban grabbing power in Kabul will lead to further radicalization in Pakistan is also foregone. Social media in Pakistan was awash with euphoria after the Taliban victory, with many calling for Sharia law to be imposed in Pakistan. This is not surprising, given that the Pakistani State has time and again

pandered to religious extremists, the recent example of the government's surrender to the extremist Tehrik-i-Labaik Pakistan, which is primarily focused on blasphemy and justifies violence in the name of faith, being a case in point. A mob of Tehrik-i-Labaik Pakistan members in December 2021 lynched and burnt a Sri Lankan executive working in a Pakistani garment factory merely on the suspicion of blasphemy. Despite its involvement in such gory acts, none other than the Pakistani Prime Minister has declared that he shares the Tehrik-i-Labaik Pakistan's ideology. The Prime Minister went so far as to call for blasphemy to be equated with the holocaust and pledged to start a campaign involving all Islamic countries to pressurize Europe to ban blasphemy against Islam.

China, with its dependent State Pakistan's strong support, is looking to dominate and exploit Afghanistan well into the foreseeable future. To that end it has been singing praises of the Taliban and offering it much-needed money without actually giving much. China's longing gaze on Afghanistan's abundant and untapped mineral resources, including valuable rare earths, has been reported upon extensively. The Chinese strategy of exploiting the economic and political vulnerabilities of poor nations worldwide by seeking to enslave them through debt trap diplomacy has become well known. Hence, while it is making feeble noises about an inclusive government in Kabul, China has made it clear that it accepts the Taliban as having all the legitimacy that China needs so long as the terrorist organization opens up all of Afghanistan's considerable natural resources for China to exploit in an unbridled manner.

China has also spoken sporadically about the Taliban needing to ensure human rights in Afghanistan, but given its own gross disregard for such rights, it is not seen as being serious on the matter. While China's persecution of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China needs no elaboration, Pakistan's defense of the Chinese atrocities against the Muslim minority group is less explicable. Pakistan has sought to position itself as the prime defender of the Islamic faith, but the Pakistani Prime Minister not too long ago feigned total ignorance of the Uyghur issue at a time when the rest of the world was talking rather loudly about it. Pakistan's virtual submission to China and the lure of the Yuan that have caused it to react counterintuitively to the plight of the Uyghurs could have serious implications for Afghanistan's security, as well as for its sovereign resources.

The images of the power-hungry military junta in Myanmar unleashing inhuman brutality against its own people and killing thousands mercilessly just because they dared to question the junta's illegal and humiliating dismissal of the people's will expressed through a bona fide electoral process were equally painful. Since the coup a year ago, the junta has turned Myanmar into a killing field, and it continues to murder and detain activists and other civilians across the country, with tens of thousands displaced from their homes by the campaign of terror in the countryside. Despite this, the junta has so far failed to consolidate its grip on the country and opposition to the February 2021 coup remains fierce and is only likely to strengthen in 2022. The economic woes that have been brought upon Myanmar by the Junta will also have serious consequences in coming times. The United Nations Development Program has predicted that almost half of Myanmar's 54 million people will be plunged into poverty this year.

The degree of solidarity and support that the people of Myanmar deserve from the international community has, sadly, not been forthcoming. Whatever pressure has been exerted on the junta has proved to be sporadic, inadequate, and largely unproductive. China, meanwhile, has begun fishing in murky Burmese waters, just as it has been doing in Afghanistan. The junta has been generously approving ambitious Chinese infrastructure projects that had not received the go-ahead from the pre-coup National League for Democracy government, and China, in return, has displayed little qualms in helping neutralize punitive international actions against the junta.

In these extremely challenging times for Afghanistan and Myanmar, our organization calls upon this august Council to recognize the imperative of intervening to ameliorate the sufferings of the people of these two nations and to thwart those that are supporting and propping up grave violators of human rights.

European Foundation for South Asian Studies, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.