

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW PAKISTAN

World Environment and Resources Council

Thank You Mr. Chairperson.

As we discuss the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan, the country is heading for its next general elections. There are prayers being said that this election might place Pakistan on the path of sustainable democratic development. Friends of Pakistan are hoping that the next government would have the courage to tackle many of the problems that trouble the people of Pakistan and have prevented them from enjoying a life of freedom and prosperity.

While examining what these problems are perhaps it might be useful to listen to the words of eminent Pakistanis themselves. In an article in the Daily Times of Pakistan some months ago Mr. Arshad M. Abbassi had said and I quote "...Our home is at trouble with itself..." Asma Jehangir the noted Human Rights Activist has spelt things out in far darker terms. She has written and I quote "... Pakistan's democratic process may once again become a part of history, leaving the world to wonder how we could so willingly poison ourselves in the belief that it would lead to better days. Those in power have consistently let their people down — ruthlessly. But no one is being fooled. They may feel helpless in the face of manipulation by everyone trying to save their skins — the judiciary included — but as the courts have often held themselves the truth does eventually prevail. In the meanwhile, the country is headed for another phase of political instability that may finally lead to yet another autocracy. Four years of democratic rule have given people little to rejoice about. Memories of dark nights and empty stomachs will begin to symbolize democracy..." end quote.

The problems that plague Pakistan are a direct consequence of wrong policies adopted by successive administrations and the overwhelming interference of the intelligence and armed forces establishment in the affairs of state.

The leadership needs to heed the voice of the people in regions as diverse as Baluchistan, wracked by an insurgency, and Gilgit Baltistan where demands for self rule are growing. The economic remedy does not lie in farming out the country to China which is what recent decisions relating to the Gwadar Port and projects in Gilgit Baltistan suggest. Pakistan needs to make itself self sufficient on the economic front and this can only happen if it rids itself of the obsession with its neighbors and ensures that its domestic educational environment and social milieu are made conducive to modern education; religious tolerance and a collaborative effort by all communities towards the modernization and development of Pakistan.

Unless such hard decisions are taken urgently there is the likelihood that Pakistan will sink further into the morass of sectarian violence; the erosion of liberalism and democratic ideals; and the ultimate transformation into a nation where minorities fear to dwell and where ordinary citizens fear to venture out lest they become the target of gunmen and suicide bombers.

It is the appropriate juncture therefore to catalogue the problems that plague Pakistan and impact of the rights of the people. Sectarian violence heads the list with hundreds of Shias being killed and the carnage continuing despite announcements by the government to stem the killing tide. This is not a new phenomenon and owes its existence to the very nature of Pakistan's polity. Pakistan's constitution effectively places the Sunnis, the majority, at an advantageous position.

The growth of extremism has been fuelled also by the educational system in Pakistan. Madrassas abound and many are known not only to provide doctrinaire teachings about the merits of violent jehad but also to provide the cadres necessary to man groups like the Taliban and the Lashkar e Jhangvi. Government school text books add to the problem. Studies conducted by institutes in Pakistan and even by the USA have revealed the role played by text books in public schools in inculcating values of hatred for other faiths. Gender discrimination; dislike for other religions; and the belief that violence in the name of God against non-believers is justified are values that are sought to be instilled in young minds.

The environment created by the legal, constitutional and education system in Pakistan has had a direct impact on the welfare of minorities. Christians, Hindus, Ahmediyas continue to suffer under a discriminatory atmosphere with the Blasphemy Laws still on the statute books and the Ahmediyas deprived of the right to worship freely or to propagate their religion. This state sanction for discrimination has allowed extremist groups to attack the minorities; force them to convert; destroy their places of worship and indulge in the destruction of their properties and the taking of their lives.

Women continue to suffer second grade status with the Hudood Ordinances depriving them of their rights. Tribal customs and a feudal system have in many instances reduced women to the status of goods to be bartered to resolve disputes between clans and tribes. The state seeks to intervene but such is the hold of the tribal and feudal system that practices like the barter of girls and women and honour killings show little signs of abating and the state appears disinclined to act.

Thank you.