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Remarks by the

Honorable Deputy Speaker National Assembly

On Panel-2:

“Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Democracy”

**September 7, 2021
(1430 - 1600 hours)**

Bismillah Irr Rahman Irr Raheem

Honorable Chairperson,

Distinguished Speakers and Parliamentarians,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Assalam-o-Alaikum and Greetings to all of you...

I feel privileged to be part of this important panel and share my take on this highly significant topic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health and economic emergency; it is also a crisis for democracy, human rights, and governance that could undermine or collapse fragile democracies.

COVID-19 has had severe socio-economic, political and health related impacts on all the countries around the world. Governments around the world have been taking measures to thwart the spread of the pandemic and balance the fundamental freedoms with health-related concerns.

Pakistan is seriously concerned on COVID-19 related negative propaganda, stereotyping and discrimination against minorities in some regions and countries around the world. The spread of disinformation also poses a serious threat to democracy. One of its prime consequences is rising Islamophobia.

Distinguished Colleagues,

The government of Pakistan has taken a number of measures to strengthen the framework of Rule of Law and Democracy. Necessary reforms are underway in the electoral process as well as allocation of reserved seats for the women and minorities to enhance their participation.

Our vibrant media with more than 100 TV channels and civil society are also playing an important role in promoting the democratic values. The independent judiciary of Pakistan has also been instrumental in upholding the principles of democracy and protection of fundamental freedoms. In the last decade, numerous judgements have strengthened the Constitutional guarantees and democratic framework.

Honorable Delegates,

In order to address the genuine grievances of the public in an effective and efficient manner, the Pakistan Citizens Portal mobile application has been launched by the Government of Pakistan. The initiative received wider appreciation both nationally and internationally as a best practice. It has resulted in quick and effective service delivery by the State institutions to any complainant.

Complying with its international obligations, Pakistan established National Commissions for Human Rights, Status of Women, Rights of Child, and Minorities in line with the Paris Principles. These Commissions strengthened the democratic values and protection of the human rights framework in the country.

The formulation of second phase of National Action Plan on Human Rights comprising protection of Civil and Political Rights; Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Environmental Rights, Labour Rights, Rights of Disabled Persons, Transgender, Women, Children and Senior Citizens, in Pakistan, is in progress. A number of Help lines are working in the Federal Capital and all provinces for the protection of vulnerable segments of the society including women, children, minorities etc.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

To mitigate the long-term impact of COVID-19 pandemic on democracy, there is a need for comprehensive information collections and vibrant policy formulation. Previous experiences regarding the pandemics suggest

that pandemics have long-term and persistent effects on all fields of life, especially the economy and political system of any country.

It is, therefore, the need of the hour that we rethink our conventional ways and improvise them through the use of modern technology, which can help in filling the gaps and provide new avenues during these times of pandemic.

Thank you very much...