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Statement by Pakistan during the Eighth Forum on Minority Issues

at 24-25 November 2015)

Mr. Chairman,

We take note with appreciation of the theme "Minorities in the Criminal Justice System" selected for the Eighth Forum on Minority Issues and the draft recommendations prepared by the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues,

Minorities form an integral part of the diverse Pakistani society and have immensely contributed to the development of the country. The Constitution provides equal status and rights to all citizens and prohibits discrimination on account of religion, race, caste, colour or creed.

For the promotion and protection of rights of minorities, Pakistan has always pursued a policy of non-discrimination in line with the vision of its founding father, Quaid-E-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The Government has been taking administrative and policy measures to ensure that minorities enjoy equal rights for it strongly believes that without guaranteeing the rights of minorities, no society can foster culture of tolerance and mutual respect. In this regard, the criminal justice system in Pakistan has played an instrumental role in promoting and protecting rights of minorities.

The independent judiciary has always been at the forefront of safeguarding rights of minorities in Pakistan. In a landmark Judgment of 19 June 2014, the Supreme Court held that each citizen of Pakistan is free to exercise the right to profess, practice or propagate his or her religious views, even against the prevailing or dominant views of his or her own religious denomination or sect. It laid down a set of clear and binding directions, including among others, setting up a task force for promoting religious tolerance; ensuring school curriculum promotes religious harmony; constituting a national council for the protection of minorities to frame policy recommendations for safeguarding and protecting rights of religious minorities; constituting a special police force to protect places of worship of religious minorities; ensuring that action, including registration of criminal cases, is promptly taken to bring perpetrators who violate rights of religious minorities to justice; and assigning a bench of the Supreme Court to oversee implementation of the judgment and entertain complaints related to violation of human rights of minorities in the country. The Government is making utmost efforts to implement the Judgment.

