Thank you very much for the opportunity to make this intervention.

Bytes for All is technology and human rights organization. Online freedom of expression and its intersection with religious minorities is an important key result area of our ongoing strategic plan. We have been using artificial intelligence assisted tools for monitoring and reporting hate crimes from public online spheres. During the last one year, we have documented shocking hate campaigns on social media against religious minorities including Ahmadis, Shia, Hindus and Christians in Pakistan.

Most shockingly, we have seen the trends, where government functionaries were also involved in hate mongering with complete impunity. To quote an incident, Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs through a Facebook video message provoked radical religious groups against Ahmadiyya on their "proposed" inclusion in the National Commission for Minorities by saying "Ahmadis are the worst enemies of Islam".

While hate mongering is a reality in Pakistani cyberspace, this incident went unchecked challenging the situation of rule of law in the country. The role of state institutions in Pakistan vis-à-vis countering hate narratives and neutralizing the hate campaigns is not at all encouraging. Pakistan has a comprehensive legal framework to counter religious hate speech; however, its use to protect marginalized groups is rare. Additionally, the non-functional national human rights institution, above all, leaves no platform for the victims of hate speech to seek redressal.

Some of the strategies that can be productive to promote safer spaces may include the effective role of NHRI equipped with the technical knowledge of online tools such as Early Warning Systems. Based on the forensic evidence, the NHRI can activate the law enforcement apparatus, so to avoid untoward situations. It is equally important for the state institutions to engage with the social media platforms including Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and others, and advocate for discouraging divisive and misleading algorithms, which unfortunately provide space for radical and ultranationalist groups to target religious minorities.

Civil society organizations working on human rights at the intersection of technology have an important role to produce empirical data, cyber forensic evidence and document hate crimes in a bid to assist law enforcement. It is also pertinent to mention that corporations should be more accountable to its users and protect the rights of minorities on their platforms. These efforts must promote the evolution of independent oversight mechanisms to highlight violations, develop pro human rights algorithms and push back the abuse of legal frameworks by the states.

We are going through unprecedent times, where emerging technologies posing range of threats and challenges to the socio-economic well-being of religious minorities. This is the time, when Governments, Corporations and CSOs need to work together for solutions. It is important to collectively devise a strategy to discourage the use of religious hate speech as a tool for making

political and economic gains. The center of this strategy is in educating citizens and promoting religious tolerance.