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Written statement* submitted by Centre d'Encadrement et Développement des Anciens Combattants, 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.

[23 January 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Drug and Human Trafficking Emanating from Pakistan

Pakistan stands as a hub of narcotics and human trafficking globally. Many innocent lives have been subjected to drug abuse and illegal trafficking within the country. Women and children are the most affected by these crimes, while Pakistan-based cartels are involved in the illicit export of drugs and human beings to other countries. There are also allegations that Pakistani security agencies sponsor or benefit from these cartels. Despite claiming to have a ‘zero-tolerance policy’ against all types and forms of drugs, Pakistan has significantly failed to control their illegal use and trafficking. Being part of the Golden Crescent, Pakistan not only serves as a transit route but also plays a major role in the global cannabinoid trade, given the high-quality production of cannabis. Meanwhile, the scale of human trafficking in Pakistan is staggering, with the Global Slavery Index estimating over three million people living in conditions of modern slavery, which includes bonded labor, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation, often targeting women and children⁽¹⁾. These two issues make Pakistan a perilous place for the local population, particularly for women and children, and jeopardize the safety and security of other regional countries and Western nations.

The narcotics market in Pakistan is influenced by both local consumption and international trafficking. Within the country, the demand for heroin and opium, along with a range of social and economic factors, impact narcotics use ⁽²⁾. Pakistan faces high levels of poverty and unemployment, creating fertile ground for drug use. In 2024, the World Bank estimates that 40.5 percent of Pakistan’s population lives in poverty, defined as surviving on less than USD 3.65 per day ⁽³⁾. This marks an increase from the previous year, during which 2.6 million more people fell below the poverty line ⁽⁴⁾.

Approximately 7.6 million people in Pakistan use drugs, including around 860,000 heroin addicts ⁽⁵⁾. Narcotics are primarily smuggled to satisfy the demands of the upper class in cities, particularly as the demand for cocaine has surged among elite youth following COVID-19 ⁽⁶⁾. Most drug users fall into the 25-39 age group and include many women who use sedatives along with amphetamines. Several reports have also emerged quoting that in the wake of Afghanistan’s ban of opium cultivation Pakistan has found alternate options to keep its drug trade and trafficking live by initiating/encouraging opium production in parts of Balochistan and KP region with help of Pak army. Now, Pakistan has emerged as a significant player in the global cannabis trade, acting as both a source and transit route. Due to its growing popularity among younger generations, Pakistan has also become a hub for synthetic drugs. Over time, the production of crystal methamphetamine and K-tablets has increased in Peshawar and Karachi ⁽⁷⁾.

In Pakistan, narcotics are smuggled out of Balochistan through Gwadar, Pasni, and various remote routes along the Makran Coast, headed for the Middle East and Europe. In Sindh, drugs are trafficked through Karachi, also directed toward the Middle East and Europe ⁽⁸⁾. Additionally, Pakistan has been contributing to the cross-border drug issue in India’s state of Punjab, exacerbating serious security concerns with the excessive use of drones. In 2023, Indian security agencies intercepted over 100 drones from Pakistan, the highest number on record ⁽⁹⁾.

Furthermore, the issue of corruption and reports of involvement by Pakistan’s security agencies in the drug trade and international trafficking have exacerbated the drug crisis in the country. Many regions through which drugs are smuggled suffer from weak governance and high levels of corruption, enabling traffickers to operate with relative impunity. This corruption ensures that the flow of narcotics continues despite efforts to curb trafficking, as local officials often have a vested interest in allowing the trade to persist. According to the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International, Pakistan ranks as the 133rd least corrupt nation out of 180 countries ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Pakistan’s role in drug proliferation is underscored by numerous arrests of its nationals in other countries for drug trafficking. In 2014, an United States of America district court sentenced a Pakistani man, Mohammad Jamal Rashid, to two years and three months in federal prison for conspiring to illegally import and traffic counterfeit and misbranded drugs ⁽¹¹⁾.

In 2018, a Pakistani national and drug trafficking kingpin, Shahbaz Khan, pleaded guilty to a superseding indictment in Manhattan federal court on charges of conspiring and attempting to import heroin into the United States of America (12).

The drug cartels wield immense power in Pakistan, and mainstream media outlets refrain from reporting on their activities due to fear of fatal repercussions. Consequently, many independent journalists attempt to expose these cartels on social media. However, traffickers are now targeting these freelance investigators throughout Pakistan. For instance, in November 2021, an independent journalist, Muhammad Zada, was murdered in his home in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for using his Facebook page to uncover the activities of drug traffickers and their associates within the local administration (13). In 2023, Pakistan enacted new anti-narcotics legislation, abolishing capital punishment for drug trafficking offenders, thus indirectly boosting their morale and enabling them to operate their illegal businesses from prison (14).

On the other hand, human trafficking in Pakistan is a silent crisis that festers beneath the surface of society, ensnaring countless women and children in a web of exploitation and despair. Trafficking for sexual exploitation is another troubling issue in Pakistan, where women and girls from impoverished backgrounds are lured with promises of employment and better lives, only to find themselves trapped in brothels and subjected to horrific abuse (15). Corruption within Pakistan's law enforcement and judicial systems exacerbates human trafficking, as bribery and collusion with traffickers undermine accountability and justice for victims. Additionally, Pakistan has failed to align its domestic laws with international conventions, such as the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (16).

When it comes to human smuggling routes, Pakistan's primary route extends through the vast, rugged, and sparsely populated province of Balochistan. Human smugglers utilize all three modes of transportation: land, water, and air. The air route is mainly used by illegal immigrants, mostly from different parts of Punjab, who have better means or resources (17). The sea route begins at the port of Gwadar, and the Coastal Highway links Karachi to Gwadar. Human 'cargo' is loaded onto boats departing from Pasni, Jiwani, Pishukan, or Surbandan. According to the United States of America Department of State's 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report on Pakistan, the country does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.

In 2023, Pakistan reported investigating 1,588 trafficking cases under the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (282 for sex trafficking, 1,035 for forced labor, and 271 for unspecified forms of trafficking), compared to 1,936 trafficking cases in the previous year (856 for sex trafficking, 988 for forced labor, and 92 for unspecified forms of trafficking) (18). According to the United States of America Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report) for 2021, "Pakistan is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking in persons" (19). This indicates that the primary challenge for Pakistan is internal trafficking, particularly forced or bonded labor (20). The 2023 Global Slavery Index estimates that 10.6 out of every thousand people were victims of modern slavery in Pakistan at any given time in 2021 (22). Consequently, Pakistan continues to face low growth rates in all important sectors amidst the dwindling indicators of the country's economy. With an incompetent and corrupt governance system and military establishment, the issues of human and drug trafficking will continue to destroy Pakistani society and will have an impact on other countries as well.