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Written Statement at the thematic intersessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) as the civil society panelist on 19 October 2021 on the Links between Drug Trafficking, Corruption and other forms of organized Crime

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am Tariq Khosa, Director of Centre for Governance Research in Pakistan, a civil society NGO and an independent think tank. It is a great honour to represent the civil society at this intersessional meeting of the CND on the nexus between drug trafficking and corruption and linkages with other nefarious types of organized crimes like illicit financial flows and money laundering. I represented the Government of Pakistan as Head of Delegation to the CND in Vienna in 2010 as the Federal Secretary of Narcotics Control and was able to get a three-pronged Narcotics Control Policy approved from the Cabinet the same year with a focus on supply reduction, demand reduction and international cooperation. Working within the government, we strongly felt that without developing community resilience and making civil society as active partner, the state alone cannot combat the menace of illicit drug trade, corruption and associated organized crimes. After my retirement from government service, I have been associated with the UNODC as rule of law and criminal justice advisor for several years. That phase highlighted the significance of developing partnership with the civil society in combating transnational organized crime. Since 2019, we launched a civil society National Initiative against Organized Crime in Pakistan and have dealt with serious and organized crimes like drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering, terror financing and cybercrimes. Recently, as part of the UNTOC Review, we are developing a coalition of civil society activists to be associated with review mechanism. So, the first lesson that we have drawn is for the society and state to forge an effective partnership in tackling the challenges of organized crimes.

Talking specifically of drug trafficking, Pakistan as part of South Asia, finds itself in the middle of conflict zone where in Afghanistan, war and mayhem resulted in a complex situation related with illicit drug trade. At its peak, 9000 metric tons of opium was cultivated there in 2017 on 263,000 hectares of lawless region close to Pak-Afghan border. Roughly 87pc of world's heroin got smuggled out of Afghanistan, making its way to the west and east through the neighboring states of Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan. Pakistan finds itself caught between the two-way traffic on Afghan drug transit route: inward flow of precursor chemicals and outward flow of heroin and hashish. The silk road of drug trade is emerging as a major challenge in view of improved connectivity that has the potential nexus with criminality, through the infrastructure development of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

An alarming picture has emerged in our regional and national context as number of drug users has increased exponentially in Pakistan, with more than 70pc heroin addicts. Another negative effect of illicit drug trade is the corruption seeping into those institutions that are responsible for drug interdiction at the border entry and exit points and dry ports within the country. There were credible reports of drug money siphoned off to feed into the terrorism activities that increased between 2003 to 2013 in Pakistan, resulting in enhanced suicide attacks and acts of terror.

While the Afghan economy teeters on the brink of collapse, there are reports opium prices have skyrocketed in southern Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover on August 15. Drug smugglers are now paying \$100 per kg of heroin. In Europe, it has a street value of over \$50 a gramme. A Taliban spokesman recently told the world they did not want to see “any narcotics produced” – but added that international backing was needed to allow farmers to shift away from the illicit trade. Therefore, my message for the CND and the international community is this: in order to stop Afghan opium production that produced some 6,300 tons in year 2020 with the UN estimate of \$2 billion worth of illicit trade, a strategy of constructive engagement is required to curb poppy cultivation after achieving a consensus based on established conventions and norms.

Thirdly, the nexus of drug trafficking with corruption and money laundering was clearly established as we in Pakistan saw an upsurge in illicit financial flows through illegal practices of Hundi and Hawala during the period from 2005 to 2014. Under Counterterrorism National Action Plan launched in 2015 and to meet the requirements of FATF, efforts are being made to break nexus between illicit drug trade and illicit financial flows. Anti-Money Laundering regime is also being strengthened. Similarly, number of convictions in terror financing has substantially increased.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the Kyoto Declaration on Advancing Crime Prevention, Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law during the 14th UN Crime Congress held in February 2021, that stressed upon effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem, which requires concerted and sustained action at the national, regional and international levels. We all have a common and shared responsibility.

Thank you.