

**OFFICE OF THE FEDERAL OMBUDSPERSON
FOR PROTECTION AGAINST HARASSMENT OF WOMEN
AT THE WORKPLACE, REGIONAL OFFICE, SINDH**

FORM OF ORDER SHEET

Date of Institution: 31.03.2025

Serial No. of Order of Proceed ings	Date of order of Proceed ings	Order of other proceedings with Signature of Federal Ombudsperson			
		TITLE	ASMARA MASOOD	VS	SYED ARIF HUSSAIN
		DEPARTMENT: STANDARD CHARTERED BANK			
1	2	3			
		<p><u>Subject: Final Order on Merits</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The initial complaint, later converted into an appeal, has been filed by Asmara Masood (hereinafter referred to “the Appellant”), who was previously employed as a Contact Centre Agent at Standard Chartered Bank (SCB), against against Syed Arif Hussain (hereinafter referred to as “the Respondent”), who was her Team Leader. 2. The Appellant alleges that during her employment at the Contact Centre, the Respondent engaged in sustained, unsolicited, and sexually inappropriate conduct, amounting to workplace harassment under Section 2(h) of 			

the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 ("Act 2010"). She states that this included prolonged staring at her body, following her into isolated areas such as the kitchen and washroom, and initiating unwarranted personal conversations under the pretext of official matters. The Respondent allegedly used his position to isolate her by seating her away from colleagues and placing a mirror on his desk to watch her. The Appellant further contends that he displayed possessive behaviour and warned male colleagues not to interact with her.

3. The Appellant further alleges that the Respondent made repeated remarks about her appearance, such as "*you have beautiful skin,*" "*you dress very well,*" and "*you look like a model.*" She states that he also made sexually suggestive comments and encroached on her personal space by suggesting she "*take her anger out on him*" in an inappropriate way. She describes an incident on 25.11.2024, when he instructed her to wait in the Head of Department's office for a meeting. After waiting 30 to 45 minutes and confirming with Team Leader Haris that no senior staff was present, she observed the Respondent exiting the washroom and leaving through the back fire exit. The Appellant contends that this incident, along with his prior behaviour, created an environment of intimidation and harassment.
4. The Appellant also alleged that the Respondent had a history of inappropriate conduct toward other female staff. She referred to a former employee, Huda, who reportedly resigned because of similar behaviour. It was further

stated that the Respondent had been reprimanded in the past for using the office phone to make calls at night to a female colleague, which led to him being banned from entering the CDD Department.

5. She further states that her leave details were shared with other Team Leader, Hira Zahid Khan, without justification, which led to her confrontation with her. After this incident, Hira Zahid Khan filed a complaint against her with HR. The Appellant claims that the Respondent then made false statements to HR, including that the Appellant had romantic feelings for him and wanted to marry him, which she denies.
6. The Appellant stated that she initially refrained from reporting the harassment due to her apprehension of retaliation. However, as the harassment intensified, she submitted a formal complaint to HR on 23.10.2024.
7. She further alleges that the Respondent initiated retaliatory action by lodging false and malicious complaints against the Appellant before various fora accusing her of harassment and threats.
8. The Appellant states that despite filing multiple complaints with the Bank against the Respondent, no disciplinary action was taken. Instead, she was served a show cause notice dated 27.02.2025 and was later terminated from service on 27.03.2025. She contends that her termination was unlawful, made in bad faith, and intended to punish her for seeking redress.

9. In response to the allegations, the Respondent submitted a written statement denying all claims of harassment. The Respondent alleges that her behaviour was inappropriate and unprofessional towards him and other colleagues, including Muhammad Wasiq Hassan and Hira Zahid Khan. He further states that he filed a formal complaint with the Bank's management because of her conduct.

10. Based on the Respondent's complaint, the Bank conducted an internal inquiry, which found the Appellant guilty of misconduct and ended in her termination. In contrast, the Respondent claims that the Bank conducted a separate inquiry into the Appellant's complaint of harassment and found her allegations unsubstantiated, taking no action against him.

11. The Respondent has further stated that the Appellant had expressed a personal interest in him, including a desire to marry him, information which he claimed was conveyed to him by another employee, Umer Khan. Following her termination, the Appellant allegedly launched a defamatory campaign on social media and posted photographs of the Respondent, Hira Zahid Khan, and the Head of Department, Sylvester Fernandes, without their consent, wherein she levelled baseless accusations against them with the intent to malign their professional reputation.

12. In support of his defence, the Respondent has submitted a police complaint dated 06.02.2025, filed by him in response to what he described as ongoing harassment and threats by the Appellant. The record includes

WhatsApp chats, admitted by the Appellant, which notably show her threatening to commit suicide in apparent retaliation. The Respondent produced excerpts of her alleged statements, including: *“Main suicide kar lo gi... phir dekhna tum... karo tum us ke sath romance aur planning,”* and *“Tum nay jo meray sath kiya... suicide kar ke sab ko yaqeen dilaungi.”* He contends that these statements were intended to emotionally manipulate and threaten him.

13. In addition, the Respondent has furnished a complaint filed before the FIA dated 03.04.2025, concerning defamatory content posted by the Appellant on LinkedIn and Facebook, in which she accused him of harassment and other unlawful conduct. He stated that during the FIA inquiry, the Appellant appeared in person, admitted writing the posts, and gave a written apology, saying she acted out of anger and frustration. The Respondent has also submitted an official letter from the Bank, which he states confirms that he was cleared of all allegations of harassment.

14. As noted above, the Appellant filed a complaint of harassment against the Respondent, and the Bank conducted and concluded an inquiry into her allegations. Since the Appellant, in her complaint before this Forum, challenged the Bank’s Inquiry Committee findings on grounds of bias and procedural flaws, the Forum treated the matter as an appeal under Section 6 of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010, through order dated 16.05.2025.

15. In light of the Appellant's objections and the Respondent's reliance on the Bank's inquiry findings, the Forum found it necessary to summon the complete inquiry report to determine if due process was observed and whether any lapses affected the fairness of the proceedings. In compliance with the Forum's direction, the record was submitted on 03.07.2025. It included the full chronology of complaints filed by and against the Appellant and the Bank's corresponding actions from 23.10.2024 until 27.03.2025, when the Appellant was dismissed from service. The sequence of events derived from the record is set out below:

On 23.10.2024: Hira Zahid Khan filed a complaint against the Appellant, alleging misbehavior and accusing her of spreading rumors about a relationship between her and the Respondent. The Appellant filed a counter-complaint the same day against Hira Zahid Khan, alleging that she shouted at her on the office floor.

On 01.11.2024: The Appellant filed a complaint against Abdul Qadir, alleging that he was staring at her and other female employees, and making them uncomfortable.

On 21.11.2024: A "Report on Duty" letter was issued to the Appellant by the functional management for remaining absent without authorization for three consecutive days.

On 25.11.2024: The Respondent lodged a complaint against the Appellant, alleging that she followed him to the washroom, questioned him about his relationship with Hira Zahid Khan, and conveyed to another employee, Umer

Khan, that she had a personal interest in him, including a desire to marry him.

26.11.2024: The Appellant's reporting line was altered to a skip-level manager, and she was formally advised to refrain from any further contact with the Respondent.

On **04.12.2024:** The Appellant filed a complaint accusing the Respondent of staring inappropriately at her breasts and hips.

On **22.12.2024 and 24.12.2024:** The Appellant was found to have accessed the confidential credit card information of the Respondent and Hira Zahid Khan without authorization.

During **November and December 2024**, the Respondent and Hira Zahid Khan filed multiple complaints against the Appellant for alleged unprofessional conduct. The complaints were consolidated, and following a fact-finding process, formal disciplinary action was recommended against the Appellant on 17.01.2025.

On **07.01.2025:** The Appellant was suspended from her duties pending the outcome of the above-mentioned disciplinary proceedings.

On **11.01.2025 and 14.01.2025:** The Appellant submitted email complaints against the Respondent, Hira Zahid Khan, and Muhammad Wasiq Hassan, alleging:

- a) Exclusion from a group photo session;
- b) Staring and honking by the Respondent near a bus stop;

- c) Staring with a “dirty gaze” by the Respondent and Muhammad Wasiq Hassan on 01.01.2025;
- d) Further inappropriate staring by the Respondent on 07.01.2025;
- e) Exclusion by Hira Zahid Khan and Muhammad Wasiq Hassan from routine departmental sessions in January 2025.

06.02.2025: The Appellant sent abusive and threatening messages to the Respondent and Hira Zahid Khan. Both individuals filed complaints against the Appellant before the **Police** and the **FIA** under Inquiry No. 610.

On **27.02.2025:** A show-cause notice was issued to the Appellant by the Bank via email as part of the formal disciplinary process.

On **27.03.2025:** The Appellant was dismissed from service following the disciplinary proceedings.

16. The appeal was heard on 03.07.2025, with both the Appellant and the Respondent appearing in person. The Members of the Bank’s Inquiry Committee, Iqra Fatima, Asma Idris, and Tariq Mustafa, were also present, along with the Bank’s Legal Counsel, Shahmeer Baloch.

17. During the course of arguments, the Appellant reiterated her version of events in support of her claim of workplace harassment and procedural lapses. She stated that she had filed her initial complaint on 23.10.2024, followed by further complaints in December and January after her suspension, all addressed to Iqra Fatima from the HR Department. She alleged that although the Bank had

CCTV cameras installed, the Employee Relations (ER) Department refused to examine any footage unless specific times were provided. The Appellant contends that this was unreasonable, given the regular and persistent nature of the harassment she faced.

18. When the Forum asked about specific incidents, the Appellant referred to 07.01.2025, stating that she was suspended after a meeting with Iqra Fatima and that, on the same day, the Respondent stared at her in an inappropriate manner while she collected her belongings. She also described an incident on 01.01.2025 at a bus stop, where the Respondent allegedly honked his motorbike and stared at her, and where he and Muhammad Wasim Hassan and allegedly looked at her inappropriately. The Appellant denied any misbehavior on her part, claiming that complaints against her were acted upon without evidence while her own grievances were ignored. She attributed this to institutional bias in favor of senior employees above Grade-7. She further asserted that she was falsely accused by Hira Zahid Khan, which led to a warning from the Head of Department, who allegedly threatened her with dismissal.

19. The Appellant conceded that she sent the messages from her registered number, explaining they were sent while she was feeling distressed and provoked. She denied any intent to defame and contended that false rumors were circulated about her, including claims that she had expressed romantic interest in the Respondent. As for the message sent to Muhammad Wasim Hassan alleging that the Respondent had "cheated" her, she explained that it

too was sent impulsively during a period of severe depression and did not reflect any personal attachment.

20. The Appellant stated that male colleagues had warned her about the Respondent's past misconduct, particularly involving a former employee, Huda. She acknowledged, however, that she had no direct knowledge of this incident, as Huda had left the Bank before her own appointment. She further alleged that the Respondent and Hira Zahid Khan were engaged and had publicly acknowledged their relationship, stating that she was being targeted for allegedly interfering in their personal affairs. She conceded that she had no evidence or witnesses to support her account and was pursuing the matter alone.

21. In response, the Respondent reiterated that the Appellant's conduct during her employment had been consistently unprofessional. He stated that initial complaints were received from customers, after which she was counseled in the presence of the Finance Manager to adhere to standard protocols. Despite this intervention, further complaints were received from staff members, including Muhammad Wasiq Hassan. On 23.11.2024, a formal complaint was filed by Hira Zahid Khan and escalated by the Respondent to senior management. He explained that when the issue was addressed, the Appellant confronted him over siding with Hira Zahid Khan, prompting him to refer the matter to Employee Relations (ER). According to the Respondent, even after he was instructed by ER to avoid further communication, the Appellant allegedly continued to approach him, entered his workspace, and caused disturbances in the presence of

employees Dhanesh Kumar and Umme Laila, who attempted to diffuse the situation.

22. The Respondent stated that after her suspension on 07.01.2025, the Appellant began calling him repeatedly from various international numbers. He blocked these numbers and reported the harassment to the ER. Despite being blocked, she continued to send abusive and threatening messages through Facebook. She allegedly wrote, "*Ab tum dekho mein karti kya hun tumhare saath, mein tumhare baap ko bhi qabar se le aongi,*" and "*Mein mar bhi sakti hun aur maar bhi sakti hun.*" According to the Respondent, she also threatened Muhammad Wasiq Hassan in a similar manner. During the FIA inquiry, the Appellant appeared in person, admitted to posting these messages, and submitted a written apology, promising she would not repeat such conduct.

23. In order to verify the developments in the complaint filed by the Respondent with the FIA, the Forum summoned the concerned officer to explain the procedural status of the inquiry. On 11.07.2025, Officer Arfa Saeed of the FIA appeared before the Forum and confirmed that the Appellant had appeared during the inquiry proceedings, admitted to sending the said WhatsApp messages and social media posts, and submitted a written apology, undertaking not to repeat such conduct. Officer Arfa Saeed further verified the authenticity of the apology letter submitted by the Bank before the Forum and confirmed it was the same document filed before the FIA. She also informed the Forum that the Appellant's mobile phone had been seized for forensic analysis, and the inquiry was

presently awaiting the results of the forensic report, after which further action would be taken.

24. During the course of proceedings, the Inquiry Committee appeared before this Forum to explain the process adopted and the basis of its findings. The Committee confirmed that it had conducted three separate inquiries into the Appellant's conduct. The first incident arose on 23.10.2024, when the Appellant accused Hira Zahid Khan of maintaining an inappropriate relationship with the Respondent. Hira Zahid Khan deemed the allegation offensive and lodged a formal complaint. Although the Appellant later claimed there had been prolonged interaction between Hira Zahid Khan and the Respondent, CCTV footage did not substantiate this. The Committee inquired into the complaints of both sides concurrently and directed the Respondent to refrain from any contact with the Appellant to prevent further escalation.

25. The Committee further reported that the Appellant habitually took unauthorized leave despite repeated warnings. She frequently confronted the Respondent with accusations of favoritism and displayed unprofessional conduct. On one occasion, she followed the Respondent outside the washroom and behaved in an aggressive manner, prompting staff to intervene. Although she was given an opportunity to explain her grievances during a virtual meeting, she did not offer any substantive clarification. Based on the record, the Committee concluded that her conduct was disruptive and her allegations were not supported by evidence.

26. The complaints dated 01.11.2024 and 04.12.2024 were jointly reviewed due to their similar subject matter, while the harassment complaints submitted via email on 11.01.2025 and 14.01.2025 were referred to the Harassment Inquiry Committee comprising Tariq Mustafa, Salima Abdul Hameed, and Asma Idris. Upon receipt, the Committee acknowledged the complaints and requested further information from the Appellant. Although she initially responded, her reply lacked supporting evidence, and she stopped communication despite follow-up reminders. In view of the Appellant's non-responsiveness and failure to provide further necessary information, the Committee proceeded with the inquiry on the basis of the available record. A show cause notice was issued to the Respondent, outlining the allegations, and his cross-examination was conducted by the Inquiry Committee. As the allegations were not supported by any corroborative evidence, the inquiry concluded with the dismissal of the complaint.

27. It was further submitted that, independent of the harassment proceedings, disciplinary action was initiated against the Appellant on account of behavioral and professional misconduct, as defined under the Bank's employment policy. The charges included unauthorized access to the credit card and CEMS credentials of the Respondent and Hira Zahid Khan, as well as sending inappropriate and threatening messages to the Respondent, Hira Zahid Khan, and Muhammad Wasiq Hassan on 06.02.2025. The Appellant was issued a show cause notice on 27.02.2025 via email, and after being

afforded an opportunity to respond, the allegations against were found to be substantiated. Consequently, the Appellant was dismissed from service on 27.03.2025 under the Bank's applicable disciplinary framework.

28. The Inquiry Committee further clarified that the alleged prior pattern of inappropriate conduct by the Respondent, such as incidents involving a female colleague named Huda, or the purported ban from the CDD department due to alleged late-night calls made using the office phone, remained unsubstantiated. The Appellant failed to provide any supporting evidence, and no complaint was ever filed by Huda against the Respondent. Upon reviewing the relevant records, the Inquiry Committee confirmed that no formal complaint or disciplinary proceedings had been initiated against the Respondent in relation to these allegations.

29. After hearing all the parties and pursuing the record, the principal questions that call for determination are:

a) Whether the inquiry conducted by the Harassment Inquiry Committee complied with the due process requirements prescribed under Sections 3 and 4 of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010.

b) Whether the Inquiry Committee correctly appreciated the evidence in dismissing the complaint on the ground that the

**alleged conducts were not substantiated
by any supporting evidence.**

30. As noted earlier in this order, the Forum directed the production of the complete inquiry record to assess procedural compliance. Upon reviewing the said record, it is evident that the Harassment Inquiry Committee acknowledged receipt of the Appellant's complaints dated 11.01.2025 and 14.01.2025, formally notified the Respondent of the allegations, and issued a show-cause notice. The Respondent submitted a written response and was questioned by the Committee to clarify the allegations. The Appellant was invited to provide supporting evidence and to cross-examine the Respondent but she failed to do so despite multiple reminders. The Committee proceeded to conclude the inquiry on the basis of the available record after affording the Appellant a reasonable opportunity to substantiate her claims.

31. The record further shows that the complaints concerning professional misconduct of the Appellant and inappropriate workplace behaviour of the Appellant, as referenced above, were consolidated and addressed under the Bank's disciplinary procedures. The harassment inquiry remained distinct from the disciplinary process and was conducted by a Committee constituted in accordance with Section 3 of the Act 2010.

32. Moreover, the Forum notes that the alleged prior misconduct by the Respondent, including incidents involving Huda and a reported ban from the CDD

department, was unsubstantiated, as no supporting information or record of formal complaints or disciplinary action was provided.

33. In view of the sequence of events and the documented steps taken, no material irregularity or breach of the procedural safeguards prescribed under Sections 3 and 4 of the Act has been established. The Forum is satisfied that the inquiry proceedings were initiated, conducted, and concluded in compliance with the statutory requirements of due process.

34. With the determination of the first issue, the Forum now turns to the question of whether the Inquiry Committee correctly appreciated the evidence in dismissing the complaint on the ground that the alleged conducts were not substantiated by any supporting evidence. This requires evaluating whether the Committee's findings were grounded in a fair, comprehensive, and legally sound assessment of the material on record, in light of the definition of "harassment" under Section 2(h) of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010.

35. The Appellant alleged that she had been subjected to harassment by the Respondent for nearly a year and claimed discomfort in his presence due to remarks made by colleagues about his conduct with female staff. She further stated that she had requested a change of team since the Respondent was her team leader, but the record contains no evidence of any such formal request. The record shows that matters remained routine until a

complaint was filed by Hira Zahid Khan, after which tensions escalated. Upon learning that Hira was aware of her leave status, the Appellant made a personal remark implying a relationship between Hira and the Respondent, which triggered a series of retaliatory complaints. When the Respondent forwarded Hira Zahid Khan's complaint instead of siding with the Appellant, she responded with frustration and began communicating with him in an accusatory and inappropriate manner.

36. Conduct of the Appellant appears to stem from personal disappointment rather than any actionable misconduct under the law. This conclusion is further supported by her statements during the Employee Wellbeing Survey dated 19.09.2024, where she described the work environment as "overall good" and confirmed, "*No, my TL is good in this aspect,*" when asked about leave-related issues. She raised concerns about Hira Zahid Khan's loud behaviour but did not mention the Respondent or allege any form of harassment. Although her statement does not preclude the possibility of subsequent misconduct, the timing of her complaint against the backdrop of interpersonal conflict and administrative disputes raises reasonable doubt as to whether the complaint was grounded in harassment or rooted in escalating workplace tensions.

37. In particular, the incident dated 25.11.2024 sheds light on the nature of the interaction between the Appellant and the Respondent. The record reflects, as admitted by both parties, that the Respondent tried to avoid direct interaction by moving towards the washroom area. While the Appellant claims he followed her into private spaces, it

is an undisputed fact that she followed him near the men's washroom and confronted him about his absence when he returned to the office. During this encounter, the Respondent reportedly stated, "*Agar Asmara tum mujsay aisay baat karogi to mein tum say kabhi baat nahi karunga.*" The situation escalated into a verbal dispute, prompting intervention by colleagues Dhanesh Kumar and Umme Laila. Viewed in totality, these facts suggest that the underlying issue was one of escalating interpersonal hostility rather than a pattern of sexually inappropriate conduct falling within the Act, 2010.

38. It is further observed that while the Appellant was vocal about the issues she was facing, as evident from her complaints submitted on 11.01.2025 and 14.01.2025, several detailed allegations now forming the basis of her claim of prolonged harassment were not included in those complaints. This omission raises concerns regarding the credibility of these allegations. A review of the record reveals that only two specific incidents were cited at the time: (i) the Respondent allegedly staring at the Appellant while honking his motorcycle near the bus stop on 01.01.2025, and (ii) staring at her again on 07.01.2025 when she approached Iqra Fatima for official discussion. The remaining assertions brought before this Forum were neither raised at the relevant time nor formally or informally documented in her initial complaints. The emergence of multiple new allegations at a later stage, without supporting evidence, does not inspire confidence in their reliability or suggest they were part of the original grievance.

39. The Forum further notes that the record reflects a growing sense of anxiety and personal concern on part of the Appellant regarding the Respondent's association with Hira Zahid Khan. The Appellant's discomfort with the perceived closeness between the Respondent and Hira Zahid Khan is evidenced by multiple incidents that followed.

40. On 23.10.2024, the Appellant directly asked the Respondent about his relationship with Hira Zahid Khan, which he denied. On 25.11.2024, she approached a colleague, Umer Khan, and stated while crying: *"Tum Arif ko bas yeh kehna. Woh mujh se bhaag raha hai. mujh se baat nahi ker raha. Usko bas yeh kehna k mera yeh behaviour bas iss wajah se hai k mei use pasand aur like kerti hun."* (Roughly translated to: *Just tell Arif that he is running away from me and not talking to me. Tell him that I behave this way because I like him.*). Umer Khan also mentioned that the Appellant repeated the request later, asking whether he had conveyed the message to the Respondent. The statement was submitted by Umer Khan to Iqra Fatima on 28.11.2025 via email. These events reflect that the Appellant had developed a personal interest in the Respondent, which may have affected her perception of subsequent workplace interactions.

41. Further, on 22.12.2024 and 24.12.2024, the Appellant accessed the credit card and CEMS credentials of the Respondent and Hira Zahid Khan. When asked, she stated that she wanted to find proof of their alleged relationship, especially since the department had not reviewed CCTV footage which she believed could support

her suspicion of the alleged relationship. These actions later formed the basis of disciplinary proceedings initiated against her.

This behavior continued to escalate on 06.02.2025, during which time the Appellant, who had been asked to refrain from work duties, sent a series of emotionally charged WhatsApp messages to the Respondent, Hira Zahid Khan, and Muhammad Wasim Hassan. These messages included threats of self-harm, offensive language, and references to the Respondent's personal life, reflecting a high level of emotional disturbance. Some of the messages are reproduced verbatim:

To the Respondent (Arif):

"main suicide krlo gi... phr dakh na tum..kero tum us sath romance or planing" (Roughly translated to: I will commit suicide... then just see what happens..Go ahead and do romance and planning with her.)

"Screenshot send krnya. BAAT hogi us beghairat ki bachi say... abhi raat ko us k sath romance kernay uthnay thy na.." (Roughly translated to: I sent the screenshot. I have talked to that shameless girl... you woke up to romance with her tonight, right?)

"tum nay jo meray sath kya... suicide kr ke sab ko yaqeen dilaon gi." (Roughly translated to: What you did to me ... I'll prove everything by ending my life.)

To Hira Zahid Khan:

"Beghairat ki bachi, teri wajah se sab kuch ho raha hai... tujhmein ghairat sharam naam ki cheez nahi hai..."
(Roughly translated to: Shameless girl, everything is happening because of you... you have no shame or dignity.)

"I will sacrifice my life..main suicide kr rahi.. Tu kr us Arif ke sath romance.. naan matakay kr Tu us k sath" *(Roughly translated to: I will sacrifice my life... i am committing suicide you go and romance with Arif... flirt with him all you want.)*

"Teray maa baap ne tujhe sirf mard phasanay ke liye paida kya hai... pehle Saad, ab Arif..."
(Roughly translated to: Your parents raised you just to trap men... first Saad, now Arif...)

To Muhammad Wasiq Hassan:

"Aap nay meray sath Acha nhi kya...Arif or Hira k affair KO support kernay k lay aap nay mujay suspend kerwa dya"
(Roughly translated to: You didn't do right with me... you got me suspended to support Arif and Hira's affair.)

"Arif nay mujay cheat kya hira ki waja say Meray marnay k baad dakhty hn Arif or hira kesay sukoon ki zandagi guzarty hn" *(Roughly translated to: Arif cheated me because of Hira... after I die, let's see how peacefully they live.)*

Moreover, the content and tone of the above mentioned WhatsApp messages sent on 06.02.2025 filled with explicit threats of suicide, offensive and gendered insults,

and emotionally charged accusations further reinforce the conclusion that the Appellant's perception of workplace events was significantly influenced by personal motives and emotional distress. These messages go far beyond the bounds of protected workplace speech and reflect a level of psychological volatility that directly impacted the work environment.

42. While recognizing that harassment can occur without direct evidence, and that circumstantial evidence and context matter, the Appellant failed to provide any corroboration testimonial, documentary, or otherwise. Even the allegedly inappropriate remarks by the Respondent such as "you look like a model" or "you have beautiful skin" are isolated, vague, and undermined by her own prior positive statements about the work environment. The Forum finds that these were not characterized as harassment at the time they were made but appear to have become objectionable only after interpersonal conflicts arose.

43. On the whole, there is no evidence to suggest the alleged conduct constituted harassment within the meaning of Section 2(h)(i) of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. The complaint was rightly dismissed for lack of substantiating evidence. The escalation in the Appellant's own behavior, including use of abusive language and threats, was appropriately addressed under separate disciplinary proceedings.

44. No legal infirmity or procedural lapse has been found in the findings of the Inquiry Committee. Accordingly, the appeal is hereby dismissed on the above stated terms.

45. It is further clarified that any inquiry pending before the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) may continue in accordance with relevant provisions of law, and nothing in this Order shall affect or prejudice those proceedings.

46. Before parting with the order, the Forum deems it important to reiterate the significance of fostering a respectful, safe, and inclusive work environment. It is essential that all institutions take proactive measures to promote awareness, encourage respectful communication, and strengthen internal mechanisms for early intervention and resolution of interpersonal concerns. Such efforts not only help prevent workplace conflicts from escalating but also reinforce the broader objective of maintaining dignity and equality for all employees, in line with the spirit and intent of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010.

FEDERAL OMBUDSPERSON