



MINUTES OF THE 1ST MEETING OF
OIC OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION (OICOA) SUB-COMMITTEE ON
WOMEN RIGHTS

Date	22 nd December 2025
Venue	Federal Ombudsperson Secretariat for Protection Against Harassment
Chaired By	H.E. Fauzia Viqar
Moderated By	Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi
Mode of Meeting	Virtual (Attended in-person by the Officers of OICOA Secretariat)
Minutes Documented By	Ms. Neelam Fatima Shujahuddin (Assistant Advisor – OICOA)

AGENDA ITEM NO.1

Recitation from the Holy Quran and Opening Remarks

The meeting commenced with the recitation from the Holy Quran. The session was formally opened by Senior Advisor at FOSPAH, **Ambassador (R) Ms. Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi**, who extended a warm welcome to all the participants attending the inaugural meeting of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women's Rights.

In her introductory remarks, Ms. Hashmi outlined the procedural arrangements for the conduct of the session. She informed the participants that each country representative would be allocated **fifteen minutes** for addressing the meeting. It was noted that the country statements received by the FOSPAH Secretariat were submitted in either **English or French**, and that the **translated versions** had been circulated to all the members in advance. Ms. Hashmi further noted that during the proceedings, simultaneous **on-screen translations** would be provided to facilitate comprehension among all participants.

She also apprised the participants that the statements from **Senegal** and **Benin** were yet to be received. Accordingly, their remarks/statements would be interpreted in real time by the interpreters present. Ms. Hashmi further stated that the order of presentations would follow the **alphabetical sequence of member states**, commencing with **Azerbaijan**.

Referring to the approved agenda, she informed the participants that the Chairperson of the Subcommittee, **H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar**, would deliver her **welcome address** prior to the commencement of presentations by the members. Upon completion of all statements, the floor would be opened for **interactive discussion and questions**.

At the end of this agenda point, Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi expressed appreciation to all the members for their cooperation and for the timely submission of their statements.

AGENDA ITEM NO.2

Welcome Remarks of the Chairperson

Under this agenda point, Chairperson of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women Rights and Pakistan's Federal Ombudsperson for Protection Against Harassment, H.E. Fauzia Viqar, addressed the participants.

Opening the session, Ms. Viqar extended appreciation to the Members of the Subcommittee for their participation, and noted with gratitude the presence of representatives attending in person as well as those joining virtually. She conveyed her thanks to all Members for their active engagement and reaffirmed the collective commitment of Ombudsman institutions across the Muslim world to uphold the dignity and rights of women.

Ms. Viqar observed that the Subcommittee had been established as a collaborative forum enabling Member States to share institutional experience, exchange best practices, and formulate a coherent and coordinated approach to the promotion of women's rights within the framework of the OIC.

Welcoming the representatives of Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Benin, Burkina Faso, Pakistan, Senegal, Togolaise and Türkiye, together with the ex officio members from the OICOA Secretariat and the Women Development Organization, Ms. Viqar commended their willingness to contribute their expertise and perspectives drawn from distinct legal and administrative contexts. She recalled that such diversity constituted the strength of the Ombudsman tradition, founded upon accessibility, fairness and service to the vulnerable segments of the society.

H.E. Fauzia Viqar noted that the *Terms of Reference* circulated in advance set out an ambitious and comprehensive work plan for the OICOA Subcommittee on Women Rights. She noted that its deliberations were expected to yield practical and measurable outcomes, which will aid in strengthening national legal frameworks and introducing procedural models to ensure the effective empowerment of women in public, social and economic life. She further stated that the present meeting would devote particular attention to the OIC's objectives in this field and invited the Members to outline their respective national policies and strategies in support of gender equality, and participation of women in decision-making, education, health, economic opportunity and social protection, as envisaged in the OIC Plan of Action.

Turning to matters of institutional development, Ms. Viqar observed that the exchange of country experiences should assist in identifying priority areas for cooperation, including the improvement of complaint-handling mechanisms, standardization of training for inquiry officers, enhancement of digital accessibility, protection of women's property rights, and the expansion of awareness campaigns enabling women to understand and exercise their legal entitlements. She expressed the view that progress in these areas would contribute to building confidence in Ombudsman institutions as instruments of justice and redress.

Drawing upon the experience of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, H.E. Fauzia Viqar referred to the work of the **Federal Ombudsperson Secretariat for Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (FOSPAH)**. She outlined the principal legislative instruments governing its mandate, namely the *Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010* (as amended in 2022), the *Federal Ombudsmen Institutional Reforms Act, 2013*, the *Enforcement of*

Women's Property Rights Act, 2020 and the *Employees' Service Rules, 2014*. She explained that these instruments provided a coherent framework ensuring confidentiality of proceedings, protection against retaliation, adherence to statutory timelines, field inspections, and a coordinated programme of nationwide awareness raising.

Inviting contributions from all delegations, Ms. Viqar urged members to share their achievements and the difficulties encountered in implementation, with a view to developing a body of shared practices adaptable across the OIC community. She emphasized that the OICOA Subcommittee's effectiveness would depend not on uniformity of systems but on unity of purpose grounded in mutual respect and commitment to justice.

In conclusion, H.E. Fauzia Viqar reminded delegates that their deliberations carried significance beyond the meeting itself, as women throughout the OIC Member States continued to look to their institutions for protection, fairness and courage. It was their confidence, she observed, that bestowed meaning upon the Subcommittee's work and their dignity that must remain its guiding principle. She closed her address by expressing the hope that the discussions ahead would be substantive and result-oriented, and that the OICOA Subcommittee would come to embody the collective determination of OIC Member States to uphold and advance the rights of women.

AGENDA ITEM NO.3

Country Statements/Presentations

Following the conclusion of the Chairperson's address, Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi, conveyed her appreciation to H.E. Fauzia Viqar for her comprehensive and inspiring remarks. She then invited Ms. Ayten Tarverdiyeva, representing the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to deliver her country statement.

i) COUNTRY STATEMENT BY OFFICE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER (OMBUDSMAN) OF AZERBAIJAN

Ms. Ayten Tarverdiyeva, representative of the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of Azerbaijan (an OICOA Member Institution) , delivered her country statement.

Ms. Tarverdiyeva conveyed her appreciation to the organizers for hosting the inaugural meeting of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women’s Rights. She expressed her pleasure in sharing Azerbaijan’s experience concerning the protection of women’s rights and the promotion of gender equality within the framework of national practice.

She reiterated Azerbaijan’s profound commitment to the universally recognized principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms, noting that the protection and advancement of women’s rights formed an integral part of the country’s broader human rights agenda. In this context, she emphasized that Azerbaijan attached particular importance to ensuring women’s full participation in social, political, and decision-making processes, consistent with international obligations and standards. The representative recalled that Azerbaijan had established a comprehensive regulatory framework to achieve gender equality, supported by significant policy measures and sustained international cooperation. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, she noted, explicitly guarantees equality between men and women under Article 25, while the Law on Guarantees of Gender Equality, adopted on 10 October 2006, provides a detailed definition of discrimination and safeguards equal opportunities across all sectors.

Ms. Tarverdiyeva drew attention to recent legal reforms that have strengthened women’s participation in the labour market. She noted that the 2022–2026 Socio-Economic Development Strategy of Azerbaijan places strong emphasis on expanding women’s access to economic opportunities, particularly in higher-paid sectors. This includes initiatives for career guidance, counselling, and employment promotion strategies aimed at narrowing the gender wage gap. In 2022, restrictions on women’s employment in 674 occupations were repealed, covering sectors such as agriculture, construction, transport, energy, and manufacturing.

She informed the meeting that the protection and promotion of women’s rights occupy a central place in the Ombudsman’s mandate. Following the amendment of

the Constitutional Law on the Ombudsman on 9 June 2023, the institution was empowered to act as the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)* and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, with a focus on equality and non-discrimination. A new structural unit on anti-discrimination was established within the Ombudsman's Office to enhance protection of women's rights and promote gender equality in accordance with international norms.

She further noted that empowering the Ombudsman to serve as an Independent Monitoring Mechanism represented an important step in adapting the institution's functions to evolving human rights challenges, improving operational efficiency, and aligning domestic practice with international standards. The Ombudsman continued to pursue the elimination of gender-based discrimination and the creation of equal opportunities for women and men in political, economic, social, cultural, and other fields of public life, while also contributing to the improvement of relevant legislation.

Ms. Tarverdiyeva stated that, based on analysis of the national situation, the Ombudsman had prepared a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening the legislative and policy framework for women's rights. These included inputs to the draft Rules on the Activity of Monitoring and Coordination Groups to Prevent Domestic Violence, as well as contributions to the *2025–2029 National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence* and the *2025–2027 National Action Plan on Gender Equality*. She highlighted that the adoption of the forthcoming *Law on Reproductive Health*, improvements in medical infrastructure and family planning services, and enhanced social protection would mark important steps in advancing women's welfare and empowerment.

Referring to Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of Azerbaijan's operation and functioning, Ms. Tarverdiyeva noted that the Ombudsman received thousands of complaints and applications from women each year. The majority concerned alimony enforcement, execution of court judgments, social security, labour rights, domestic violence, property disputes, health care, and education. Each case, she emphasized, was examined within the Ombudsman's mandate, and competent authorities were requested to take corrective measures where violations were identified. Many of these interventions resulted in positive outcomes for complainants.

She added that recommendations previously issued by the Ombudsman concerning the prevention of early and consanguineous marriages had been reflected in amendments to the *Family Code*, *Criminal Code*, and *Code of Administrative Offences*. These legislative revisions aimed to address persistent challenges relating to early marriage and to strengthen family protection mechanisms.

Ms. Tarverdiyeva informed participants that the Ombudsman and its four Regional Centers actively engage in national and international events on women's issues and gender equality. The institution maintains close cooperation with state bodies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and media outlets, organizing awareness-raising seminars and training sessions on gender-based violence, early marriage, and equality. These initiatives have significantly improved public understanding of women's rights and have contributed to more positive societal attitudes toward gender equality.

She noted that broad awareness-raising campaigns were conducted annually as part of national and international observances, including the "Human Rights Month" (18 May–18 June), "Child Rights Month" (20 October–20 November), and the "16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence" campaign (25 November–10 December). These outreach efforts, held across Baku and the regions, had greatly expanded public engagement and promoted the development of a stronger culture of gender awareness and respect for women's rights.

She further elaborated that, pursuant to *Article 14 of the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, the Ombudsman submits an Annual Report to the President and Parliament within two months after the end of each year. The report presents the Ombudsman's findings on the protection and restoration of human rights and freedoms, prevention of violations, outcomes of awareness and analytical activities, engagement with civil society, and international cooperation. It also includes proposals and recommendations for improving the protection of human and civil rights. She noted that these reports contained recommendations to accelerate the adoption of the Law on Reproductive Health and Family Planning, establish an Alimony Fund, introduce gender quotas to enhance women's political representation and economic participation, expand access to microcredit, and integrate gender studies into curricula and educational materials.

In conclusion, Ms. Ayten Tarverdiyeva reiterated her appreciation to the organizers and participating Member States for the opportunity to share Azerbaijan's experience within the framework of the OICOA Subcommittee's deliberations. She

also reaffirmed unwavering commitment of Government of Azerbaijan and Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of Azerbaijan, to the promotion and protection of women's rights in accordance with international obligations and the principles of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Emphasizing Azerbaijan's determination to continue its efforts in strengthening gender-responsive governance, she highlighted the importance of sustained regional cooperation, mutual learning, and the exchange of best practices among OIC Member States. Ms. Tarverdiyeva expressed confidence that the collaborative work of the OICOA Subcommittee would serve as an important platform for developing unified strategies and institutional mechanisms to ensure equality, prevent discrimination, and advance the role of women in all spheres of public life.

Following the conclusion of the statement by the representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi, expressed her appreciation to Ms. Ayten Tarverdiyeva for her comprehensive and substantive presentation. She acknowledged the valuable insights and recommendations shared, noting that the experiences highlighted by Azerbaijan in promoting women's empowerment and ensuring gender equality would serve as a source of learning and inspiration for all participating Members.

Ms. Naghmana Hashmi then invited **Ms. Maryam Ahmad Abdulnoor** (Chief of Coordination and Follow-Up) from the Ombudsman **of Bahrain**, to deliver her country statement.

ii) **COUNTRY STATEMENT BY GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF GRIEVANCES (OMBUDSMAN) OF THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN**

Ms. Abdulnoor expressed her gratitude for the invitation to participate in the inaugural meeting of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women's Rights. She conveyed her appreciation for the initiative and remarked that the establishment of this Subcommittee constituted a significant step towards consolidating the efforts of Member States in the promotion and protection of women's rights. She affirmed Bahrain's firm belief in the value of collective engagement and knowledge exchange as means of strengthening institutional capacities and ensuring a coherent regional framework consistent with shared values and international human rights commitments.

Introducing her statement, Ms. Abdulnoor indicated that it would be divided into two parts: the first relating to the work of the *Supreme Council for Women (SCW)* as the national authority on women's issues, and the second addressing the *Equal Opportunities Committee* within the Ombudsman of Bahrain's Office and its contribution to internal gender mainstreaming.

She explained that the SCW serves as the Government of Bahrain's principal advisory body on women's affairs, established by Royal Order on 22 August 2001 and subsequently strengthened through later amendments. The Council operates under the direct authority of His Majesty the King, reflecting the State's high-level commitment to integrating women's advancement into national development priorities.

In outlining the principal areas of the SCW's mandate, she noted that its first function concerns policy formulation, which focuses on developing strategies and mechanisms that enable women's full participation in public life and decision-making. The second is legislative review and monitoring, through which the Council examines laws and regulations to ensure they are consistent with the principles of equality and non-discrimination. The third involves public awareness and education, encompassing seminars, dialogues, and outreach initiatives designed to promote understanding of women's rights and responsibilities within society. She added that research and documentation form an integral component of the Council's work, ensuring that policies are informed by empirical evidence and international best practice.

Ms. Abdulnoor highlighted the Council's engagement in international cooperation, particularly in representing Bahraini women at regional and global forums and in maintaining partnerships with civil society, academic institutions, and multilateral organizations. The SCW's collaboration with UN Women, she noted, supports Bahrain's alignment with the *Sustainable Development Goals*, notably *SDG 5* on gender equality and women's empowerment, ensuring that national initiatives remain in step with global development frameworks.

Turning to the Ombudsman Office of Bahrain, Ms. Abdulnoor described the *Equal Opportunities Committee* as a key internal mechanism for promoting gender equality within the institution. She outlined its principal functions, beginning with policy integration, through which gender equality principles are embedded in the Office's policies and operations. The second function, monitoring and implementation, ensures compliance and advances the inclusion of women across all occupational

levels. The Committee also performs an advisory function, providing guidance on gender-responsive recruitment, training, and promotion practices to ensure equal access to professional development opportunities.

She further explained that the Committee plays a proactive role in promoting workplace equality, striving to maintain a professional environment free from discrimination, and in empowering women through capacity-building initiatives. Under this mandate, the Committee conducts workshops, seminars, and awareness activities designed to strengthen leadership skills and professional advancement among women employees.

Ms. Abdulnoor added that the Ombudsman's Office maintains regular coordination with the *Supreme Council for Women*, sharing progress reports, outcomes of activities, and future plans. This collaboration, she observed, ensures alignment with national gender equality objectives and the ongoing refinement of institutional standards to prevent discrimination and promote equitable participation in the workplace.

In conclusion, Ms. Abdulnoor reiterated her appreciation to the OICOA Secretariat, FOSPAH, and fellow OICOA Member Institutions for facilitating this exchange of experiences. She reaffirmed Ombudsman of Bahrain's continuing commitment to advancing women's rights and institutional equality, both domestically and within the wider OIC community. She expressed confidence that the work of the *OICOA Subcommittee on Women Rights* would contribute to the development of coherent, mutually reinforcing mechanisms across Member States, and would strengthen the collective capacity of Ombudsman institutions to promote justice, equity, and gender balance in public life.

Following the statement by the representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain, moderator of the meeting Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi, thanked Ms. Maryam Ahmad Abdulnoor for her detailed and informative presentation. She commended the Kingdom of Bahrain for its structured institutional framework, the proactive role of the Supreme Council for Women, and the innovative measures undertaken by the Ombudsman's Office to promote workplace equality and women's empowerment.

She then invited Ms. Thérèse Hessou Hontonou (Gender Project Manager) of the Office of the Mediator of Republic of Benin, to deliver her country statement.

iii) **COUNTRY STATEMENT BY OFFICE OF THE MEDIATOR OF BENIN**

The representative of Mediator of **Benin**, Ms. Thérèse Hessou Hontonou presented a comprehensive overview of national achievements, challenges, and future priorities in promoting women’s rights under the theme “*Promotion of Women in Benin: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects.*” She began by emphasizing that Benin, under its **National Development Plan (NDP) 2018–2025**, has chosen to invest in *human capital* as a central driver of inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Women, who constitute more than 52 percent of Benin’s population, play an essential role in this vision. The Government of Benin, she noted, recognizes that investing in women by strengthening their skills, knowledge, and expertise is fundamental to national development and social cohesion.

She outlined that Benin has committed to reinforcing its **institutional and legal frameworks**, while also implementing numerous programs, strategies, and initiatives aimed at protecting, promoting, and increasing the participation of women in decision-making processes. Drawing on data from the **national report on the implementation of the Beijing+30 Declaration and Platform for Action**, she highlighted Benin’s progress in promoting gender equality across multiple domains — political participation, education, health, economic empowerment, and social protection — alongside the adoption of new legislative mechanisms to advance equality and social justice.

At the political and institutional level, Benin has made considerable strides toward achieving gender parity and strengthening women’s empowerment. The country’s constitutional, legal, and policy commitments reflect adherence to international and regional frameworks, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, *CEDAW*, the *ILO Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women*, *Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment*, the *Beijing Platform for Action*, and *UN Security Council Resolution 1325*, among others.

Ms. Hontonou informed that the **2019 constitutional amendment** introduced an important provision of **Article 26 (2)**, which allows for special legislative measures to enhance women’s representation. This was operationalized through the *Electoral Code of 2019*, which reserved **24 seats exclusively for women** in the National Assembly and required political parties to nominate at least one woman per

constituency. As a result, women's representation in Parliament rose by approximately 18 percent.

She further mentioned the adoption of the *National Gender Policy (2009)*, which promotes positive masculinity and shared domestic responsibilities between men and women. Several institutions have been entrusted with advancing these objectives, notably the **Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance (MASM)** and the **National Institute for Women (INF)**.

The MASM is responsible for defining, coordinating, and evaluating the State's gender and women's empowerment policies. Among its key initiatives are the *Project on Gender Promotion and Women's Empowerment*, the *Program for Modernization of Public Spaces for Social Protection and Gender Promotion*, the *SWEDD Project (Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend)*, and the *Productive Social Safety Nets Program "GBESSEKE."* The Ministry also coordinates gender focal points across government institutions to ensure the mainstreaming of gender considerations in public policy.

The **National Institute for Women (INF)**, vested with legal personality, has the authority to promote and protect women's rights, to represent victims in judicial proceedings, and to provide comprehensive assistance to survivors of gender-based violence. The INF operates a national help line, maintains regional focal points across the country, and serves as a civil party in court proceedings, having participated in 531 cases, with 318 judicial decisions rendered in favor of victims. It also conducts nationwide awareness campaigns with community and traditional leaders on laws protecting women and girls from violence.

Ms. Hontonou also noted that since **December 2021**, three landmark laws have been enacted:

- *The Law No. 2021-11 on special measures to punish sex-based offences and protect women;*
- *The Law No. 2021-12 amending the 2003 Law on Sexual and Reproductive Health; and*
- *The Law No. 2021-13 amending the 2004 Persons and Family Code.*

These laws have significantly enhanced legal protection against gender-based violence and expanded access to family planning and reproductive health services.

At the community level, the Government has implemented programs such as the *ALAFIA microcredit scheme*, which enables thousands of women to obtain civil identification documents and access social services including health insurance (ARCH), healthcare, and microcredit for income-generating activities.

Ms. Hontonou also acknowledged the **persistent challenges** that continue to hinder the full realization of gender equality, including entrenched socio-cultural barriers, high female illiteracy rates, weak enforcement of women's rights, limited reporting of abuse, insufficient budget allocations for gender-related programs, and low representation of women in governance and public administration.

Looking ahead, Benin's priorities include conducting **sectoral gender diagnostics**, strengthening access to credit and training for women, expanding economic empowerment programs, enhancing male engagement in promoting women's leadership, ensuring equality in elective and appointive offices, and integrating gender modules in education and professional training systems. Other focus areas include implementing gender-responsive budgeting, strengthening inter-institutional coordination, increasing public awareness of women's rights, and advocating for the adoption of a *Parity Law* to institutionalize gender equality in public life.

In conclusion, the representative from Mediator of Benin reaffirmed that the **Ombudsman of the Republic of Benin**, in its human rights mandate, collaborates closely with national structures working on gender equality and protection of vulnerable groups, including women, children, youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. She expressed confidence that these concerted efforts would accelerate progress toward the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and contribute to building a strong and capable female human capital base for the country's development.

Moderator of the meeting, Ms. Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi thanked Ms. Thérèse Hessou Hontonou for her comprehensive and data-rich presentation and for sharing Republic of Benin's experience, institutional measures, and future priorities aimed at ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment.

iv) **NATIONAL COUNCIL OF COMMITTEES OF BURKINA FASO**

Following the presentation by the representative of the Republic of Benin, moderator of the meeting Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi, informed the meeting that a representative of the National Council of Committees of Burkina Faso, Mr.

Abdulkader Konfe was also among the participants. She apprised members that, while the representative was attending the session in an observational capacity, no formal statement would be delivered on behalf of National Council of Committees of Burkina Faso. Ms. Hashmi clarified that this arrangement was due to ongoing political developments within the country, and that the representative's participation would, therefore, be limited to observing the proceedings without intervention.

v) **COUNTRY STATEMENT BY PAKISTAN'S FEDERAL OMBUDSPERSON FOR PROTECTION AGAINST HARASSMENT (FOSPAH)**

(Delivered by H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar – Federal Ombudsperson for Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace, and Chairperson, OICOA Subcommittee on Women's Rights)

Ms. Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi invited H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar to delivered the country statement for FOSPAH.

Ms. Viqar commenced her address by welcoming the participants and expressed appreciation for the platform provided by the Subcommittee to exchange national experiences on the advancement of women's rights across the OIC Member States. She observed that the status of women in Pakistan lies at the intersection of the country's **constitutional framework, Islamic values, and developmental priorities**, and reflects a sustained national commitment to promoting gender equality and safeguarding women's dignity.

She noted that over the past two decades, Pakistan has established an extensive constitutional, legal, and institutional framework to advance women's rights. While acknowledging that challenges of implementation and social transformation persist, as they do in many countries, she emphasized that Pakistan's trajectory represents measurable progress in building a rights-based architecture for women's empowerment.

H.E. Fauzia Viqar structured her remarks around four principal themes: constitutional and legal transformation, the jurisprudential role of the superior judiciary, the institutionalization of women's protection mechanisms, and the emerging impact of these measures on women's lives.

Beginning with the constitutional foundation, she observed that the Constitution of Pakistan (1973) embeds women's rights within both the chapter on Fundamental Rights and the Principles of Policy. *Article 25* guarantees equality before law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, while also mandating affirmative measures for the protection of women and children. *Article 34* directs the State to ensure women's full participation in all spheres of national life; *Articles 35, 37, and 38* obligate the State to protect the family, the mother, and the child, and to promote humane working conditions, maternity benefits, and social and economic justice. She noted that the Constitution is not gender-neutral but gender-conscious, placing a positive obligation on the State to eliminate exploitation and ensure the full and equal participation of women.

Building upon this constitutional commitment, Pakistan has enacted a comprehensive body of legislation at both federal and provincial levels to address discrimination, violence, and exclusion. *The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006* relocated key offences from the Hudood framework to the Penal Code, thereby reducing the wrongful criminalization of women. Subsequent reforms addressed issues such as honour killings, domestic violence, acid crimes, forced and child marriages, and harmful customary practices. Other notable enactments include the *Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010* (and corresponding provincial acts), the *Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011*, amendments to the *Pakistan Penal Code* strengthening penalties for gender-based violence, and the *Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Acts*, implemented across multiple jurisdictions.

She further noted that legislative reforms were complemented by electoral and economic measures. *The Elections Act (2017)* mandated women's representation in political parties and required that at least 10% of votes cast in any constituency be from women voters, failing which the election would be declared void. Similarly, the *Companies Act (2017)* introduced mandatory requirements for women's inclusion on corporate boards. Collectively, these laws signify a deliberate transition from symbolic recognition of women's rights to enforceable legal entitlements.

H.E. Fauzia Viqar highlighted the crucial role of **institutional frameworks** in operationalizing these legal guarantees. The *National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)*, established in 2000 and given statutory independence in 2012, reviews legislation, monitors implementation, and advises the government on compliance with international obligations under *CEDAW*, the *Beijing Platform for*

Action, and the *Sustainable Development Goals*. Provincial commissions perform parallel functions at the sub-national level. She further referenced a nationwide network of **women’s shelters, gender-based violence courts, women police stations, and legal aid centers**, supported by the *National Commission for Human Rights* and civil society partners.

Ms. Viqar emphasized that these institutions, together with the judiciary, have begun to **transform both legal practice and public expectations**. She noted that the **superior courts** of Pakistan have progressively interpreted constitutional guarantees, particularly the right to dignity (*Article 14*) and equality (*Article 25*), to reinforce protections for women, including through judgments relating to harassment, inheritance, and property rights.

Turning to her institution’s mandate, H.E. Fauzia Viqar elaborated on the role of the **Federal Ombudsperson Secretariat for Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (FOSPAH)**, a specialized forum established under the *Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010)*. She explained that FOSPAH’s jurisdiction extends beyond sexual harassment to include all forms of workplace discrimination, reinforced by amendments introduced in 2022. The Ombudsperson is empowered to order remedies, including penalties, reinstatement, and institutional reforms, and to ensure compliance with mandatory codes of conduct and internal inquiry mechanisms. Under the *Enforcement of Women’s Property Rights Act (2020)*, FOSPAH also adjudicates cases involving the deprivation of women’s property rights within the Islamabad Capital Territory, ensuring timely redress and coordination with law enforcement and revenue authorities.

Ms. Viqar informed participants of the meeting that in **2025**, FOSPAH registered **1,560 complaints** relating to workplace harassment and property rights, disposing of **1,215 cases**, with an overall **80% resolution rate, which is reflective of** the growing public confidence in the institution. She cited notable 2025 decisions, including one which held that the excessive and intrusive use of surveillance systems (CCTV monitoring) in workplaces may constitute harassment when used in a manner that undermines dignity and creates a hostile environment. In another landmark decision, FOSPAH imposed penalties on the head of a major public university for prejudicial remarks against women, affirming that harassment also encompasses conduct that demeans or intimidates in addition to sexual advances.

H.E. Fauzia Viqar underscored that these decisions have contributed to a **jurisprudential evolution** by broadening the interpretation of harassment as an abuse of authority rather than desire, thereby extending protection to digital and psychological forms of misconduct. She further noted that FOSPAH's rulings have been upheld by appellate forums, including the President of Pakistan, thereby strengthening the institution's legal standing and clarifying its jurisdiction following the Eighteenth Amendment.

In addition to adjudication, FOSPAH undertakes **extensive outreach and awareness initiatives**, including training for inquiry committees, art exhibitions, media campaigns, and partnerships with development organizations. These efforts aim to foster a culture of respect, equality, and accountability across workplaces. H.E. Fauzia Viqar added that FOSPAH collaborates closely with civil society organizations and other ombudsperson institutions under the umbrella of the **Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman (FPO)**, which serves as a platform for coordination among fourteen Federal and Provincial Ombudsmen/Ombudspersons of Pakistan.

She concluded by reflecting on Pakistan's broader trajectory, noting that **sustained constitutional commitment, targeted legislative reform, and empowered institutions** have collectively redefined the normative landscape for women's rights in Pakistan. While challenges of enforcement and societal attitudes persist, the institutional progress achieved provides a durable foundation for further advancement. She emphasized that continued investment in enforcement mechanisms, training, and public education would be essential to deepening impact and sustaining reform.

In closing, H.E. Fauzia Viqar reaffirmed the commitment of FOSPAH to the collective mission of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women's Rights. She expressed gratitude to the participating Member Institutions and to the OICOA Secretariat for their collaboration and support.

Following the conclusion of the statement by **H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar**, moderator of the meeting **Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi**, expressed her appreciation to H.E. Fauzia Viqar (Chairperson of OICOA Subcommittee on Women Rights) for her comprehensive and substantive address. She observed that her statement had provided a valuable overview of constitutional guarantees, legal reforms, and institutional mechanisms advancing the rights of women in Pakistan, and commended the leadership of H.E. Fauzia Viqar in translating those commitments into practical outcomes.

Ms. Hashmi then invited the representative of the **Republic of Senegal, Ms. Yaye Fatou Gueye Gassama** (Senior Advisor) to deliver the country's statement. However, it was noted that no representative of Senegal was available to take the floor at that time.

She proceeded to invite the representative from Office of the Mediator of Togolese to deliver the country statement on behalf of **H.E. Ms. Amadou Aboudou Awa épse Nana (Mediator of Togolese)**.

vi) **COUNTRY STATEMENT BY MEDIATOR OF TOGOLESE**

The representative of the Mediator of **Togolese Republic** delivered its country statement. In her address, the representative reaffirmed Togo's firm commitment to advancing women's rights in harmony with the strategic orientations of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the objectives outlined in the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. She emphasized that gender equality and women's empowerment constitute central pillars of Togo's national development vision and are pursued through an integrated framework of legislative, institutional, and socio-economic reforms.

She noted that the **Constitution of Togo, adopted on the 6th May 2024** enshrines the principle of equality between men and women, thereby reaffirming the State's duty to uphold non-discrimination and equal rights for all citizens. Togo, having ratified the ***Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*** in 1983, continues to align its domestic framework with international standards. Major legal reforms have since strengthened these commitments. The ***Criminal Code (Law No. 2022-018 of 15 November 2022)*** introduced explicit provisions criminalizing rape, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, incest, and pedophilia, while extending protection against moral, psychological, and economic harassment. The ***2022 amendment to the Code of Persons and the Family*** further entrenched gender equality by recognizing shared parental authority and abolishing the notion of "head of household," thereby ensuring parity within family law.

Additional measures, such as ***Decree No. 2008-094/PMRT of 13th June 2008***, established gender focal points across ministerial departments to mainstream equality into all areas of governance. The ***Act No. 2022-020***, passed on **29 November 2022**, for the protection of students against sexual violence introduced

comprehensive safeguards within educational institutions—public and private, secular and faith-based— hereby defining sexual violence broadly to encompass coercion, cyber-harassment, and the exploitation of minors under sixteen years of age. The law imposes criminal liability not only on perpetrators and accomplices but also on individuals who fail to prevent or report such acts.

She elaborated that Togo has also adopted a *National Policy for Equity and Gender Equality (PNEEG)* and a *National Strategy for Equity and Gender Equality (SNEEG 2019–2028)*, whose shared vision is to make Togo an emerging nation free from discrimination, where men and women participate equally in and benefit equitably from development. These frameworks prioritize institutional capacity-building, enhancement of women’s economic potential, equitable access to social services, and the strengthening of women’s roles in governance, justice, and peacebuilding. Implementation is coordinated through the *General Directorate for Gender and the Promotion of Women*, housed within the Ministry of Social Action, Women’s Promotion, and Literacy.

The representative of Mediator of Togo also underscored the government’s creation of inter-institutional coordination mechanisms and community-based structures to expand access to justice and protection services for women. Among these are the **Houses of Justice**, designed to reduce procedural and financial barriers to justice; the **Women’s Houses** and regional listening centers offering counseling and psychosocial assistance; and integrated one-stop centers providing comprehensive support to victims of gender-based violence. She further highlighted the *Pan-African Program of Excellence for Africa (PEFA)*, which promotes the education and leadership of young girls, alongside national initiatives aimed at cultivating women’s political participation, preventing early marriage, and fostering academic achievement among girls.

Turning to socio-economic measures, she outlined a series of government initiatives to improve access to education, health, and financial resources for women. Since the *2021–2022 academic year*, public education has been rendered free at all levels, including the abolition of secondary school fees. Complementary reforms include the free issuance of birth certificates, no-cost prenatal consultations, and state-subsidized caesarean procedures. To institutionalize equity within the budgetary process, **gender-responsive budgeting** has been introduced across all ministries and agencies.

She also drew attention to the **economic empowerment measures** implemented under the leadership of **President of Togo H.E. Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé**, notably the reservation of **25 percent of public procurement contracts** for women and youth entrepreneurs, the establishment of the **National Fund for Inclusive Finance**, and targeted **social protection schemes** offering cash transfers to women in vulnerable situations, particularly during health emergencies or natural disasters.

With regard to political participation, she noted that a presidential decree has significantly reduced the electoral deposit required for women candidates—from fifty thousand CFA francs to twenty-five thousand, and subsequently to twelve thousand five hundred—following recommendations from the *Permanent Dialogue and Consultation Framework*. This measure, widely welcomed by political parties and civil society, aims to eliminate financial barriers to women’s political engagement and to promote balanced gender representation within elective institutions. Consultations are ongoing to explore the introduction of quota systems and other incentives to consolidate these gains.

In conclusion of her statement, the representative from Mediator of Togo reiterated the Government of Togo’s and Mediator of Togo’s determination to pursue the empowerment of women as a fundamental component of social cohesion and sustainable development. By aligning its national initiatives with the strategic orientation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Mediator of Togo seeks to advance a vision of inclusive growth that recognizes women not merely as beneficiaries but as equal partners in national progress. She emphasized that true development cannot be achieved without gender equality and reaffirmed her Government’s resolve to create an environment in which every woman in Togo can contribute fully to, and benefit equally from, the nation’s advancement.

Following the insightful statement given by Meditor of Togolese, moderator of the meeting Ambassador (R) Naghmana Hashmi invited the representative for Ombudsman Institution of Turkiye, **Ms. Hande Hazneci (Expert – Department of European Union and International Relations)** to deliver her country statement.

vii) COUNTRY STATEMENT BY OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTION OF TURKIYE

Ms. Hande Hazneci began by conveying greetings from **H.E. Mehmet Akarca**, Chief Ombudsman of Türkiye and President of the OICOA, noting his deep

appreciation for the initiative undertaken by **H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar** and his continued support for the establishment and functioning of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women's Rights. She expressed her satisfaction that the initiative had materialized through this inaugural meeting and commended the organizers for their efforts.

Ms. Hazneci explained that, as her delegation's written presentation had not been submitted in advance, she would offer a concise overview of Türkiye's principal legal, institutional, and practical measures for the promotion and protection of women's rights. She stated that the **Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye** guarantees full equality between women and men and permits positive discrimination in favour of women to achieve substantive equality. The ***Turkish Civil Code***, she noted, enshrines equality within marriage, property, and family relations, while the ***Turkish Penal Code*** criminalizes domestic violence, sexual assault, and so-called honour-based crimes.

She highlighted ***Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence against Women*** as the country's principal legal instrument for safeguarding women from violence. This law authorizes restraining orders, access to shelters, and financial assistance for women in distress. Türkiye's commitments under international instruments, including the ***Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)***, further reinforce the binding nature of these protections within the domestic legal order.

She noted that Türkiye's **Grand National Assembly** hosts several specialized committees dealing with human rights, including the ***Human Rights Inquiry Committee*** and the ***Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men***, which monitors gender equality and prepares analytical reports and recommendations to the government. While the **Ministry of Family and Social Services** remains the principal body responsible for developing social policy, Türkiye's **Bar Associations** also play an active role by providing **free legal assistance** to women requiring representation or advice.

Ms. Hazneci described the establishment of ***Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİM)*** across the country, which provide psychological, legal, and social counseling, as well as coordination among relevant institutions for the protection of victims. These centers ensure that women and accompanying children receive immediate shelter, assistance, and rehabilitation services. She also drew attention to ***KADES***, a mobile application developed for women at risk of violence. The

application allows victims to send an instant emergency alert for prompting immediate response from law enforcement authorities.

Turning to the institutional structure of the Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye, Ms. Hazneci explained that the Office operates under a Chief Ombudsman, elected by Parliament, alongside five Ombudspersons who are also elected by the legislature. One Ombudsperson holds a dedicated mandate for **women's and children's rights**. While the Ombudsman Institution does not possess ex officio powers and acts only upon complaints submitted by citizens or foreign residents receiving services from public authorities, it still plays an important role in monitoring gender equality and promoting institutional accountability.

She noted, however, that the Ombudsman Institution's jurisdiction is limited to public administration and does not extend to disputes between private individuals. As a result, cases of domestic violence fall outside its direct mandate. Nevertheless, the Institution contributes to enhancing **coordination between public authorities** and supports systemic improvements in state response to gender-based violence.

Ms. Hazneci referred to a recent **special report** prepared by the Ombudsperson responsible for women's rights and her team of experts, titled "*Strengthening Institutional Harmony in Combating Violence against Women.*" The report was based on on-site investigations and consultations with relevant authorities and offered detailed recommendations to improve inter-agency coordination and strengthen institutional mechanisms of protection.

She further explained that the Ombudsman Institution intends to expand its outreach efforts to increase the number of complaints submitted by women, particularly from vulnerable groups. Planned initiatives include targeted engagement with **women in prisons and shelters**, ensuring that they have access to institutional redress mechanisms. Public awareness campaigns remain an important priority, and the Chief Ombudsman of Türkiye and OICOA President H.E. Mr. Mehmet Akarca continues to lead national outreach efforts by organizing **regional conferences** in various provinces and engaging with universities to promote awareness among young people.

Ms. Hazneci emphasized that Türkiye attaches great importance to **international cooperation and exchange of best practices**. The Ombudsman Institution maintains active collaboration with regional and international bodies, including the **OICOA**, and remains committed to strengthening institutional partnerships to enhance women's protection frameworks.

In conclusion, she expressed Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye's appreciation to the OICOA Secretariat and all participating Member States for their commitment to this important cause. She also reaffirmed OICOA President H.E. Mehmet Akarca's readiness to continue contributing to the Subcommittee's work through knowledge-sharing, cooperation, and collective advocacy for women's rights and equality across the OIC region.

Upon the conclusion of the country statement by the Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye, moderator of the meeting, Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi, extended her appreciation to Ms. Hande Hazneci for her comprehensive and informative statement.

She then invited **Mr. Almas Ali Jovindah, Executive Secretary of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Ombudsman Association (OICOA)**, to deliver his remarks.

viii) ADDRESS BY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OICOA

In his remarks, **Mr. Almas Ali Jovindah** stated that it was a privilege for him to represent the Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Ombudsman Association (OICOA) at the inaugural meeting of the Sub-Committee on Women's Rights. He extended his sincere appreciation to **H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar** (*Chairperson of the OICOA Sub-Committee and Pakistan's Federal Ombudsperson for Protection Against Harassment*), whose initiative during the 4th OICOA General Assembly held in Tehran in May 2025 led to the establishment of this body. He acknowledged that it was through her clarity of purpose and institutional vision that the proposal was conceptualized, endorsed by the General Assembly, and subsequently approved by the OICOA Board.

Mr. Jovindah emphasized that the establishment of the Sub-Committee marks a significant step in OICOA's institutional development. He observed that the protection of women's rights is not only a social or gender issue but also a matter of good governance and institutional accountability. When administrative systems fail to protect women, whether in the workplace, in property disputes, or in access to public services, it reflects a broader governance deficit. The creation of the OICOA Sub-Committee, therefore, signifies the recognition among OICOA Member Institutions that the credibility of ombudsman offices rests on the inclusivity and fairness of the justice they deliver.

He further outlined that the OICOA Sub-Committee on Women's Rights aims to provide a structured platform for **peer learning, capacity-building, and exchange of institutional practices** among OICOA Member Institutions. By fostering dialogue, the Sub-Committee will enable Members to identify procedural gaps that may inadvertently exclude women from accessing justice, develop more responsive complaint mechanisms, and strengthen institutional safeguards for equality before the law.

Mr. Jovindah highlighted the central role of **FOSPAH**, noting that its role as host of the Sub-Committee's Secretariat was both **symbolic and substantive**. He described FOSPAH as one of the leading examples within the OICOA community of how an Ombudsman institution can address gender-based injustice through effective, rights-based, and context-sensitive mechanisms. Acting under the *Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010)* and the *Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act (2020)*, FOSPAH has successfully translated women's legal entitlements into tangible, enforceable outcomes across Pakistan.

He also commended FOSPAH's strong emphasis on **education, awareness, and prevention**, acknowledging that its outreach initiatives, institutional trainings, and capacity-building programmes have encouraged both public and private entities to internalize the principles of dignity, equality, and non-discrimination. This preventive function, he noted, reflects the true spirit of ombudsman institutions, that is not only to resolve grievances but to anticipate and prevent them.

By situating the Sub-Committee's Secretariat within FOSPAH, Mr. Jovindah observed, OICOA has affirmed its commitment to an institutional philosophy that upholds the empowerment and protection of women within the broader principles of justice and administrative propriety. He further noted that the creation of this Sub-Committee reflects OICOA's institutional vitality and maturity and its ability to evolve through the initiative of its Members and the collective purpose that defines the Association's work.

Looking ahead, Mr. Jovindah reaffirmed the OICOA Secretariat's full support for the Sub-Committee's work under the leadership of its Chairperson. He assured that the Secretariat would continue to document, synthesize, and present the Sub-Committee's findings and recommendations to the OICOA Board and General Assembly for further deliberation and institutional follow-up.

In conclusion, Mr. Jovindah emphasized that this Sub-Committee provides the OICOA with a focused platform to examine how administrative justice systems can

more effectively respond to the experiences of women. Its success, he stated, will be measured by the clarity it brings to institutional procedures and the practical remedies it inspires. He extended his best wishes to **H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar** and all Sub-Committee Members for productive deliberations and expressed his confidence that their collective work would strengthen women's rights and access to justice across OIC Member States.

Following the address by the Executive Secretary of OICOA, Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi extended her appreciation to Mr. Almas Ali Jovindah for his statement and for his strong & unequivocal endorsement of the work of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women's Rights led by FOSPAH. She noted that such support and encouragement from the Secretariat are vital to sustaining the Subcommittee's momentum and ensuring that its members continue to pursue their work with renewed vigour and commitment.

Ms. Hashmi then invited **Mr. Arif Anwar Baloch (Inspection and Monitoring Advisor to Pakistan's Provincial Ombudsman of Punjab)**, to present his statement.

ix) STATEMENT BY PAKISTAN'S PROVINCIAL OMBUDSMAN OF PUNJAB

In his remarks, Mr. Baloch expressed appreciation for the preceding presentations, particularly the comprehensive overview of Pakistan's legal and institutional framework for women's rights shared by H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar. He stated that, in view of that detailed exposition, his intervention would focus on the structure, functioning, and specific contributions of the Office of the Ombudsman Punjab toward women's empowerment and protection from harassment.

He explained that in the Province of Punjab, two separate Ombudsman institutions play critical and complementary roles in advancing women's rights. The first is the Office of the Ombudsman Punjab, which addresses complaints of maladministration across all provincial departments, while the second is the Office of the Ombudsperson Punjab, which has an exclusive mandate on gender-related issues, including sexual harassment and workplace discrimination.

The Ombudsman Punjab, established under the Punjab Office of the Ombudsman Act, 1997, operates as an independent constitutional institution tasked with protecting citizens' rights, ensuring adherence to law, and providing redress against

administrative injustices committed by provincial government entities. He informed the participants that the Office is currently headed by H.E. Ms. Ayesha Hamid, the first woman ever to hold this constitutional post. Under her leadership, the institution has prioritized accessibility, citizen-centric service delivery, and gender inclusion. In pursuit of these goals, the Office has modernized its complaint management system and enhanced its outreach mechanisms. A 24-hour helpline (1050) operates continuously throughout the year, with an internally redesigned routing structure to minimize waiting times and eliminate misdirected calls. The helpline staff undergo comprehensive, periodic training, supported by real-time monitoring to ensure efficiency and prompt resolution of complaints.

Mr. Baloch added that the Office has obtained ISO 9001:2015 certification for its quality management system; an achievement reflecting its commitment to excellence, efficiency, and accountability in public service.

He elaborated that the Ombudsman Punjab's work in support of women's empowerment is anchored in three key pillars. The first is institutional accessibility. The Office maintains district-level offices across Punjab, ensuring that both urban and rural women can access its services free of cost, without the financial burden of legal representation. This presence, he emphasized, enables women to challenge administrative misconduct or discrimination by public officials efficiently and with dignity. The second pillar involves proactive awareness and outreach. Under the initiative titled "*From Complaint to Change: Justice for Every Woman*", the Office provides cost-free services to aggrieved women and undertakes awareness drives to encourage them to seek institutional redress. The initiative has earned widespread appreciation, with numerous testimonials received from beneficiaries expressing gratitude for timely assistance. The Office has also participated in and organized a range of national and international seminars and conferences dedicated to women's empowerment, rights protection, and gender equality.

The third pillar centers on administrative relief and enforcement, with particular emphasis on issues affecting women's financial security, property rights, education, and workplace safety. The Office regularly engages with key provincial departments, including the *Police Department, School Education Department, Child Protection Bureau, Revenue Department, Housing and Urban Development Department*, and the *Local Government and Community Development Department*, to address systemic grievances and ensure compliance with statutory obligations.

Mr. Baloch noted that the Ombudsman Punjab possesses the authority to take suo motu notice of matters reported through the media or by private individuals, ensuring that even unrepresented or marginalized citizens are not denied access to justice. As of November 2025, the Office had received 2,848 complaints from women, reflecting the growing public confidence in its ability to deliver fair and timely redress.

He also outlined the institution's five operational modes of complaint registration, which include (i) the 24-hour helpline, (ii) postal submissions, (iii) the official website and email interface, (iv) social media platforms and mobile applications, and (v) a newly introduced Mobile Van Service. The Mobile Van Service travels to designated areas according to an announced schedule, enabling citizens, particularly women in remote or underserved communities, to submit their complaints on-site.

Mr. Baloch further informed the meeting that the Office has established Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Committees in all provincial departments, including within the Ombudsman's own Secretariat. These committees function to ensure compliance with anti-harassment legislation and to provide internal grievance redressal mechanisms.

He concluded his remarks by reaffirming the institution's commitment to continuous improvement and to collaboration with both national and international partners, including OICOA Member Institutions, in the exchange of best practices and the promotion of women's rights. He expressed his gratitude to the Chair and participants for their attention and concluded with thanks and prayers for the success of the Subcommittee's endeavours.

Following the statement, moderator of the meeting, Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi thanked Mr. Arif Anwar Baloch for his comprehensive statement and for sharing the best practices of the Provincial Ombudsman of Punjab – Pakistan.

Ms. Hashmi then invited the **representative of the Provincial Ombudsperson of Pakistan from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)** to deliver the next statement.

x) **STATEMENT BY PAKISTAN'S PROVINCIAL OMBUDSPERSON OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA (KPK)**

Ms. Shabana Gul (Director of Provincial Ombudsman Secretariat – KPK), addressed the meeting virtually. She began by extending warm greetings to the

Chairperson and members of the Subcommittee, while expressing her appreciation for the opportunity to participate, albeit remotely, owing to prior domestic commitments that prevented her attendance in person.

Ms. Gul conveyed her sincere gratitude to H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar, Chairperson of the Subcommittee, for her leadership in conceptualizing and establishing this important platform. She also expressed appreciation to the OICOA Secretariat and Member Institutions for their support in approving the initiative and for recognizing the centrality of women's rights within the broader framework of administrative justice.

She noted that women's rights form an integral part of human rights, and that the global community continues to place increasing emphasis on ensuring equality, dignity, and protection for women. She outlined that issues such as protection at the workplace, access to property, and fair delivery of public services constitute the core areas in which Ombudsman institutions can play an effective role.

Presenting data from her institution, Ms. Gul informed the meeting that the Provincial Ombudsman Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had received 5,348 complaints during 2024, of which 554 were filed by female citizens. During 2025, up to the end of November, 7,567 complaints had been registered, of which 700 were from women. While the overall increase in total complaints was encouraging, the relatively low proportion of complaints from female citizens, she noted, indicated persistent challenges in awareness, accessibility, and communication. These figures, she added, underscore the importance of strengthening outreach efforts and enhancing women's confidence in Ombudsman institutions as trusted avenues of redress.

She emphasized that the OICOA Subcommittee on Women's Rights could play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by providing a structured forum for knowledge-sharing, peer learning, and capacity-building among Member States. By fostering cross-institutional collaboration, she observed, the Subcommittee could help Member Ombudsman offices develop effective strategies for improving women's access to justice and protection against administrative inequity.

Turning to the Islamic perspective, Ms. Gul reminded participants that the protection and empowerment of women are deeply rooted in Qur'anic injunctions and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). She highlighted that Islamic law, or Sharia, enshrines a comprehensive set of principles designed to ensure justice, dignity, and security for all individuals—principles that remain universally relevant to contemporary human rights discourse.

She elaborated on several foundational rights guaranteed under Islamic law:

- ***The right to life and security***, emphasizing that unlawful killing or harm is strictly prohibited and that the protection of life, honour, and dignity constitutes a central tenet of Islamic jurisprudence.
- ***The right to equality and non-discrimination***, affirming the inherent equality of all human beings irrespective of race, gender, language, or culture, with superiority resting only upon piety and good conduct.
- ***The right to justice and fair trial***, ensuring impartial adjudication, due process, and protection from arbitrary arrest or punishment.
- ***The right to freedom of belief and expression***, grounded in the Qur'anic verse (2:256), "There is no compulsion in religion," which guarantees freedom of conscience and worship within the bounds of public morality and respect for others.
- ***Social and economic rights***, including the entitlement to basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, clothing, education, and medical care, and the obligation upon the community and the state to support those unable to provide for themselves.
- ***Protection against abuse of power and torture***, with Islam strictly prohibiting physical or psychological harm, degrading treatment, or misuse of authority.
- ***The right to education, property ownership, inheritance, and contractual capacity***, long recognized in Islamic law, ensuring that women have equal rights to pursue education, hold property, and enter into legal agreements independently.

In concluding her remarks, Ms. Shabana Gul reaffirmed that the moral and legal foundations of women's rights in Islam provide enduring guidance for contemporary governance and institutional practice. She expressed confidence that through collective commitment and cooperation within OICOA, Member Institutions could translate these values into more accessible, fair, and responsive systems of justice for women across the Muslim world.

Following her address, Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi thanked Ms. Shabana Gul for her thoughtful presentation and for reminding participants of the universal principles enshrined in Islam concerning the dignity and rights of women.

She then invited H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar, Chairperson of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women’s Rights, to deliver her concluding remarks and to open the floor for comments and discussion.

AGENDA ITEM NO.4

Concluding Remarks

At the outset of the concluding session, H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar, invited the representative of the Women Development Organization (WDO), Ms. Reem Arrad, to offer comments should she wish to do so. Ms. Arrad thanked the Chair for the opportunity and conveyed that she did not wish to make any additional remarks at this stage.

Taking the floor, H.E. Ms. Viqar began by expressing appreciation to all participants for their constructive engagement throughout the meeting. She observed that before determining the next steps and future plan of action, it was important to briefly recapitulate the key insights and learnings emerging from the day’s discussions. Ms. Viqar noted that the deliberations had reflected a rich diversity of experiences and institutional practices across OIC Member States and OICOA Member Institutions — ranging from constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination to policy innovations and enforcement mechanisms aimed at ensuring women’s protection and empowerment.

She further noted the valuable advocacy and advisory practices shared by Member States such as Bahrain, where the Equal Opportunities Committee has been empowered to recommend policy and legislative reforms to government, and Togo, where recommendations on issues such as reproductive health and gender equality have been formally adopted by the government and incorporated into national planning instruments. The Chair also acknowledged innovative mechanisms aimed at enhancing institutional reach and accessibility. Referring to the “mobile van” initiative of the Provincial Ombudsman of Punjab, she commended its proactive approach in taking grievance redress mechanisms directly to citizens, particularly women in remote and underserved areas.

Turning to the broader context, H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar emphasized the importance of situating the Subcommittee’s work within the overarching framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). She recalled that the key pillars of the *OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW)* — including women’s

participation in decision-making, access to education, health and nutrition, economic empowerment, and social protection — are fully aligned with the Subcommittee’s mandate. The Subcommittee, she noted, thus serves as a practical mechanism for translating the OIC’s commitments into actionable institutional reforms and capacity-building among Ombudsman offices.

Looking ahead, Ms. Viqar proposed a set of next steps for the OICOA Subcommittee’s work. She announced that the FOSPAH Secretariat under her Chairpersonship would compile a compendium of laws, policies, and institutional initiatives presented by the Subcommittee Members during the meeting. This document would be circulated among all OICOA Members to facilitate mutual learning, comparative analysis, and alignment of national frameworks.

She further proposed that the Subcommittee develop a consensus-based set of recommendations to be presented to the OICOA General Secretariat and the General Body, ensuring that the outcomes of this inaugural meeting contribute meaningfully to the broader institutional agenda of the Association.

In line with the Subcommittee’s Terms of Reference, H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar reaffirmed plans to organize capacity-building sessions on relevant laws, policies, and practices — both for Subcommittee members and for the wider OICOA membership. In this regard, she invited the Women Development Organization (WDO) to collaborate in the design and implementation of these training sessions, particularly those focused on gender-sensitive governance, legal reform, and administrative protection mechanisms.

Regarding the frequency and format of future meetings, the Chair suggested that members collectively decide whether subsequent sessions should be held virtually or in person, and whether hosting could be rotated among Subcommittee Member States. She noted that such flexibility would strengthen ownership, visibility, and participation across the network.

Ms. Viqar encouraged members to continue sharing, through online channels, any significant legal, policy, or institutional developments in their respective countries related to women’s rights and administrative justice. This ongoing exchange, she stated, would sustain the momentum generated by the inaugural meeting and foster continuous institutional learning.

In conclusion, the Chairperson opened the floor for an interactive discussion, inviting members to share observations, suggestions, and ideas concerning the day's proceedings and the proposed future roadmap.

AGENDA ITEM NO.5

Any Other Remarks/Open Discussion

i) Remarks by Executive Secretary OICOA – Mr. Almas Ali Jovindah

Following the Chair's invitation for open discussion, **Mr. Almas Ali Jovindah, took the floor. He** once again extended his appreciation to **H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar** and all participants for their active engagement and valuable contributions. He described the session as *“an excellent exchange of legislative experience, institutional knowledge, and practical insight into the promotion of women's rights across OIC Member States.”*

Mr. Jovindah echoed the observation made earlier by Ms. Hande Hazneci from the Republic of Türkiye, emphasizing the importance of enhancing public awareness on women's rights as well as deepening understanding within Ombudsman institutions themselves. He underlined that such awareness is essential to realizing the objectives of the OICOA Subcommittee and ensuring that the protection of women's rights becomes an integral part of the culture of administrative justice.

He noted that OICOA currently comprises 36 Member Institutions, and expressed his hope that in the future, participation in the Subcommittee's work would become even broader and more inclusive. He assured participants of the meeting that he would raise this matter with the OICOA President H.E. Mehmet Akarca and the Board Members, with a view to encouraging active engagement of all OICOA Members in forthcoming sessions of the Subcommittee.

The Executive Secretary further informed members that the key takeaways from this meeting would be featured in the forthcoming OICOA Newsletter, which is circulated not only among all OIC Member States but also among countries globally where Ombudsman institutions are active. He observed that this would enhance the visibility and relevance of the Subcommittee's work and potentially encourage broader participation and engagement from both OICOA members and international counterparts in future meetings.

Mr. Jovindah also welcomed the Chairperson H.E. Fauzia Viqar' proposal to develop a compendium of national laws, policies, and initiatives presented during today's session, noting that such a document would serve as a valuable instrument for peer learning and knowledge exchange among OICOA Member Institutions.

ii) **Remarks by Representative for Mediator of Togolese**

During the open discussion, the **representative from the Republic of Togo** took the floor and expressed her appreciation for the informative presentations delivered during the session. She raised a specific query directed to **Ms. Ayten Tarverdiyeva**, representative of the **Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan**, concerning the issue of **equal pay for women and men**, which had been referenced in Azerbaijan's country statement.

The Togolese representative inquired whether the principle of **equal remuneration** was **formally institutionalized within Azerbaijan's national legal and policy framework**, or whether it remained primarily a **practice adopted voluntarily by certain institutions and organizations**. She further sought clarification on whether the measure constituted an **integral part of state policy and law** or was being implemented through administrative practice.

As **Ms. Tarverdiyeva** was not connected online at that moment, moderator of the meeting, **Ambassador (R) Naghmana Alamgir Hashmi**, acknowledged the question and assured the representative from Togolese that her query would be **formally communicated to the Azerbaijani representative** for response.

At this stage, H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar, Chairperson of the Subcommittee, invited members to share their views regarding the proposed number and frequency of Subcommittee meetings for the year 2026, to encourage consensus on a schedule that would allow sustained collaboration and follow-up on agreed actions.

In response, the representative from the Mediator of Togolese proposed that the Subcommittee consider holding its meetings once every two months, noting that this interval would allow members adequate time to prepare progress updates and exchange substantive inputs between sessions. She also suggested that the timing of future meetings be slightly adjusted, explaining that the current schedule coincided with early morning hours in Togo, which posed challenges for ensuring participation.

H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar shared her personal suggestion that the Subcommittee might consider convening **quarterly meetings** during the year, striking a balance between regular engagement and the practical constraints of members' institutional responsibilities. She emphasized, however, that this proposal remained **open for discussion**, and that the final decision on meeting frequency would be taken in consultation with all members to ensure inclusivity and convenience.

iii) Remarks by Pakistan's Provincial Ombudsman of Punjab

Mr. Arif Anwar Baloch, representing the **Office of Pakistan's Provincial Ombudsman of Punjab**, expressed his agreement with the proposal for **quarterly meetings**, noting that such an arrangement would provide an optimal rhythm for coordination and follow-up. He proposed that the Subcommittee adopt a **hybrid format**—allowing members to participate either **virtually via Zoom** or **in person at Islamabad**, depending on their convenience and availability.

Mr. Baloch further suggested that, in addition to formal meetings, the **best practices and initiatives from member countries** be highlighted through **short documentary features or video presentations**, which could be shared with all participants via email. This, he noted, would help ensure **maximum dissemination and peer learning**, allowing members to draw inspiration from each other's experiences and adapt innovative models within their respective national contexts.

AGENDA ITEM NO.6

Closing Observations and Adjournment

Following the exchange of views on the proposed frequency of meetings, **H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar**, Chairperson of the Subcommittee, noted that several members had expressed support for the idea of holding meetings on a **quarterly basis**. She observed that this arrangement appeared to strike a practical balance between maintaining continuity and allowing members adequate time for preparation and follow-up between sessions.

The Chairperson added that the representative from Togo, who had earlier proposed a maximum frequency of once every two months, might also find quarterly meetings acceptable, given the spirit of flexibility expressed during the discussion. Ms. Viqar stated that, while a **final decision** would be taken after further consultation, there

was **initial support** for convening the OICOA Subcommittee Meetings **four times a year**.

In her final observations, H.E. Ms. Fauzia Viqar, expressed sincere appreciation to all participants for their active engagement, thoughtful contributions, and the spirit of collegiality that had defined the inaugural session. She thanked members for making the meeting an insightful and productive exchange. She informed the participants that the **minutes of the meeting** will be prepared by the OICOA Secretariat and would be circulated by FOSPAH Secretariat in due course for their review and record.

She then invited any final comments or questions from participants. As there were none, the Chairperson formally **declared the inaugural meeting of the OICOA Subcommittee on Women's Rights closed**.