Madam Chairperson,

The Secretary General’s initiative to hold this symposium on international counter-terrorism is praiseworthy. Like other distinguished speakers, I would like to focus on ‘promoting dialogue, understanding and countering the appeal of terrorism’.

Madam Chairperson,

It is indeed a paradox that in today’s world greater connectivity and interdependence is accompanied by prejudices and divisions among and within societies. In our global age, social networks can lead to both convergence and divergence among societies and cultures.

Pakistan does not endorse facile and self serving hypotheses of conflict among cultures and civilizations. We believe that dialogue, constructive engagement and pro-active reach-out is anti-dote to all such negative generalizations. While responses to conflicting political interests are often cast in cultural or religious terms, it is only an expedient disguise for those pursuing narrow political objectives by violent means. The need to promote dialogue, cooperation, and understanding among cultures is, therefore, a contemporary imperative. We must empower the economically marginalized parts of societies and pursue dialogue to counter the appeal of extremism to them.

The root causes of extremism like poverty, unemployment, and long unresolved disputes need to be addressed to make dialogue a lasting success. Bringing the disenchanted into the political mainstream can be very useful. It is
necessary to eschew policies that alienate people and make them vulnerable to extremism. Dialogue, understanding and empathy rather than oppression should be instruments of choice.

**Madam Chairperson,**

Pakistan’s experience of successfully countering the appeal of terrorism in the Swat valley is instructive. Initially, our initiative of dialogue with terrorists was criticized in the media. We engaged in dialogue with extremists and exposed their intransigence which reduced their support in the society. We provided alternatives to violent methods of resolving problems. It was through political engagement and our offer of solution to political problems that we proved the unreasonableness of terrorists. Terrorists violated the agreements with the Government which reduced their credibility. When the moral bankruptcy of terrorists was comprehensively proved time and again, it built the social support against terrorists and ensured success of our operation against them.

Moreover, the fixation on narrow approaches to fight terrorism, either through operational measures alone or solely through legal mechanisms is not helpful. The causes of terrorism are multiple and need a comprehensive response from the international community. Piecemeal responses will neither address historical injustices nor will resolve festering disputes. The response of the international community has to be long-term and multi-pronged involving dialogue among civilizations, economic development, cultural harmony, dispute resolution, and political settlements.

We must do everything possible to offer potential supporters of terrorists hope in the political processes. Democratization and a sense of ownership of
political system can help neutralize the violent narrative of terrorists by offering non-violent means for settling differences and disputes. Political upheavals sweeping through various parts of the world today, which are homegrown, have limited the ability of terrorists to reach out to target populations.

Madam Chair,

A key question is why promotion of dialogue and understanding, as a part of counter-terrorism strategy, is not being pursued with the vigour it deserves in spite of so much emphasis on it in UN documents. While terrorism has to be fought with unyielding resolve, it is important to avoid moral absolutism. We need to make extraordinary efforts to create a space for promotion of dialogue and understanding.

We need to challenge the assumptions of those who flourish on misunderstanding and knowledge deficit. We must be guided by our common humanity and our common and universal values. The way forward is to foster mutual understanding, dialogue, and enlightenment as well as concentrate on countering the appeal of terrorism by the development of human resources, poverty alleviation, education, dispute resolution, and social justice.

Thank you.