

Press Release

26 July 2021 (Lahore)- Federal government of Pakistan through a Presidential Ordinance has decided to formally end Higher Education Commission's (HEC) autonomy and bring it under subordination of the Ministry of Education. In this connection, Higher Education amendment Ordinance was issued on 26 March 2021; that reduced the employment period of HEC's Chairman from 4 years to 2 years, with the added stipulation that he would cease to hold office forthwith. Immediately after making it public, a notification to terminate the services of the current Chairman was issued. Soon after taking this decision, the government discovered both the Ordinance and the notification are full of legal flaws and the *second* notification was issued on 5 April 2021 and the *second* amendment ordinance was promulgated on 8 April 2021.

Federal government's such chaotic actions appeared to be ill conceived and expressed its malafide intentions. These actions have led to compromise on merit, transparency, the standards of education, rights of students, opportunities of development and have also undermined the integrity of the country, globally. Higher Education Commission was established as an autonomous body in 2002 to promote quality education in the country. Abolishing its autonomy and placing HEC under the Ministry of Education whose performance in the field of education already had a question mark further deteriorated HEC's position and effectiveness.

These concerns were raised yesterday during a press briefing where various representatives of Civil Society Organizations including lawyers, academics, journalist bodies and trade unions condemned these actions of the Federal Government at the Lahore Press club. It is to be noted that some of the petitioners who are pursuing a legal case against Presidential Ordinance in the Islamabad High Court were also present. The speakers observed that the country is already faced with many issues and the Presidential Ordinances could further add into these problems and destabilize the situation in the country. The current regime has continuously ignored the supremacy of the Parliament and tend to run the country with the Presidential Ordinances. In democracies the new legislation or amendments in laws are done through Parliamentary deliberations and public representatives do this business through mutual discussions and consensus. But this amended law was presented before Parliament after three days of its issuance, which was a blatant violation of Parliamentary and democratic norms. The speakers deplored these actions and declared such maneuvers as mal-intentions of the regime.

From the very outset, the current regime campaigned against its former Chairman by pointing out considerable decrease in allocation of financial resources for higher education. Prime Minister's inspection team under his directions was authorized to conduct investigations against HEC and its Chairman. Although, these malicious investigations failed in giving any results but the biased vice chancellors and other members continued to run this campaign and approached National Accountability Bureau (NAB), that also could not produce any desired situation.

In fact, these ill-conceived government maneuvers were meant to safeguard the Prime Minister's favorite person and close confidant Mr. Atta-ur-Rehman, current Chairman of Prime Minister's Task Force for Science and Technology. He was worried about the fact that the financial resources provided to education institutions under his supervisions could be transferred to HEC's merit based financial system. Such actions from Prime Minister's office were meant to save Mr. Atta-ur-Rehman and his institution from accountability process. The speakers reiterated that these institutions were being financed through public

money and all institution must undergo accountability process without discrimination to ensure transparency and rule of law. Public has all the rights to hold such institutions accountable!!

They also stated that government's interventions to supersede or undermine HEC's autonomy has added into worries of members/office holders of governmental and private education institutions. Current regime has done irreversible damage to the education system through its anti-education policies. It has not only reduced funds for higher education but has also appointed corrupt and non-professional individuals on higher education positions. Such actions are a direct attack on the autonomy of HEC and other educational institutions. Pakistan's Civil Society Organizations, lawyers, Journalists' community and persons associated with education firmly demand that the current government should immediately halt its non-friendly actions, repeal the Presidential Ordinance, restore the autonomy of HEC and remove corrupt individuals from higher positions they hold in education institutions.