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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Organisation internationale pour les pays les moins avancés (OIPMA), a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Children and armed conflict – the case of the Republic of South Sudan and of the Republic of Yemen

The focus of Organisation internationale pour les pays les moins avancés “OIPMA” (the International Organization for the Least Developed Countries “IOLDCs”) among other issues, is on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), including South Sudan and Yemen.

The recruitment of children by armed groups and forces remains one of the most pressing human rights issues of our time. In 2017, more than 240 million children around the world were living in countries affected by conflict. Many of them face violence, displacement, hunger and exploitation by armed forces and groups.

The protection of children has been firmly present on the agenda of the UN concerned bodies since the establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in 1996 by the United Nations General Assembly.

The Human Rights Council, in Paragraph 13 of Resolution 31/20 on the situation of human rights in South Sudan adopted at its Thirty-first session on 23 March 2016, strongly urged all parties to end and prevent human rights violations and abuses committed against children, and calls upon all parties to end immediately the unlawful recruitment of children and to release all children that have been unlawfully recruited to date.

Armed forces and armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, have abducted, recruited and used children nationally or transnationally, exposing them to the highest degrees of violence, exploitation and risk of potential sexual abuse by adults or other children in their military group.

The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan in September 2018 resulted in a decrease in hostilities and a slight improvement in humanitarian access to children. The Agreement urges the Government to ensure that the protection of children is addressed in its implementation by ensuring that crimes against children are not amnestied. Nevertheless, the parties have made modest progress on the implementation of the Agreement and spikes in abductions and sexual violence against children were noted after the signing of the Agreement. In addition to the spike in cases of sexual violence, attacks predominantly involved the destruction and looting of educational or medical facilities, with on-going impunity for violations against children, all of which have a devastating effect on access to education and to health services for children.

The armed forces of South Sudan is one of seven countries reported in the 2018 'list of shame' on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in the Children and Armed Conflict report published annually by the UN Secretary-General.

The fractured nature of South Sudan's conflict has made identifying returning children a challenging and dangerous task. In addition, the number of children still within the ranks of armed groups is very high, and several areas remain unsafe, leaving many children beyond the reach of support actors.

However, progress is being made. The release of more than 900 children in 2018 is a positive step and reintegration support facilitated by the government, UNICEF and their partners is having an important impact.

The signing of OPAC in September 2018 indicates an appetite for progress by the Government of South Sudan as well as its commitment to work to demobilize all children under 18 presents in the ranks of its armed forces.

In the case of Yemen, the crime of recruiting and engaging children in armed conflict has been of utmost importance for the Security Council, which held two special meetings on recruitment children in Yemen in May and June 2019. However, the Secretary-General's annual reports to the Security Council on child recruitment in Yemen did not raise the need of a response to the Security Council. This was due to the lack of accurate and adequate information provided by the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) regarding the escalation of child recruitment in Yemen.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has included the Houthi militia, the Government forces and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula for the second time in the annual "list of shame" for gross violations of children during the armed conflict. However, the methods of the Islah party and Al-Qaida and the Houthis militias have evolved from indoctrinating school students, brainwashing and obliging them to be devoted by the spirit of hostility, violence, hatred and love for fighting. They have convinced them about their duty to fight against Israel and the United States of America, as the shortest route to paradise.

This phenomenon began with Al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia, and has since become one practised by ISIS and Al-Houthi Militia. The Houthi senior leader admitted to the Associated Press that the Houthis have recruited 18,000 child soldiers to their army since 2014.

Likewise, the Islah party (the Muslim Brotherhood) also practices child recruitment in Yemen, using the camps of the Yemeni government forces currently under the power of the Islah Party which dominates the decision-making in the Yemeni government.

Moreover, in spite of the pledge made by Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi militia to stop child recruitment in Yemen during his meeting with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in November 2012, child recruitment has rather escalated.

Areas controlled by the Yemeni Government, for decades, have been fertile ground in attracting, mobilizing and brainwashing children in the name of religion by the Islah Party (Muslim Brotherhood), Al-Qaida and ISIS.

Radical leaders of the Islah Party, including those internationally classified as terrorists, have attracted and recruited children on behalf of Al-Qaida, a strategy upon which relationships with the Yemeni army in Marib, Shabwah, Abyan, Taiz and Hadramout, has been developed. Children are brainwashed and trained on the use of weapons and they are used in suicide missions.

The recruitment of children by the Houthis according to reports from local, regional and international organizations declare that some 18,000 to 25,000 children in Yemen have been recruited. However, the UN MRM has stated in their communications that individual cases are rather in the hundreds, a factor which minimises the gravity of the situation thereby precluding the possibility to bring an end to the conflict.

IOLDCs, upon review of the MRM reports, would emphasise that the efforts made by the UN in addressing child recruitment in Yemen, fail to really reflect the words of the Secretary-General urging the need to "take the necessary preventive and protective measures".

In addition, sources in the Houthi-controlled Criminal Investigation Department in Sanaa, have reported that, the Houthi militia, in 2018, detained many women on political or ransom purposes. Reports, however, published in local and international media merely reflect "the tip of the iceberg" of this situation.

A source that spoke on condition of anonymity because of security considerations, declared that Houthis kidnap women from the streets, or arrest them from the homes, and hide them in the Criminal Investigation Department, for interrogation.

The increase in child recruitment by the Houthis in Yemen requires an MRM which ensures that information is obtained in a manner consistent with the humanitarian principles of the United Nations.

For this reason, OIPMA believes that the United Nations mechanisms should confront the situation fully armed and empowered with the relevant mandate, in order to bring an end to child recruitment in Yemen and bring to account the perpetrators. Execution of this task should be in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law to protect children in armed conflict. Any resolution, treaty or convention on the protection of children in armed conflict adopted outside of these conditions be irrelevant and not sustainable.

The real numbers of child soldiers in Yemen, according to the latest report presented at both the General Assembly and the Security Council, remain undocumented.

UN internal regulations charges the UN Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and the coordinators of UN agencies residing in Yemen, to guarantee the accuracy of information provided in reports.

OIPMA, therefore, calls upon the Human Rights Council to:

- Adopt a resolution requesting the Panel of Experts to focus on child recruitment in Yemen and to submit accurate and reliable information. The resolution should demand the release of children recruited by the Houthis and the Yemeni Armed forces;
- Review and scrutinise MRM mandates, providing them with specialized advisers in the protection of children recruited in armed conflict;
- Prioritize the reintegration of all children affected by armed conflict through a comprehensive, coordinated and child rights-based approach so as to prevent recurring cycles of violence and to build sustainable peace for all children;

Lastly, OIPMA joins the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, in calling for much greater accountability and effort, to prevent commission of the “six grave violations”: Recruitment and use of children by parties to conflict; rape and other forms of sexual violence; attacks on schools and hospitals; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access, endured by children in countries, such as South Sudan and Yemen, in armed conflict.
