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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 Elizka Relief Foundation, 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.

[30 May 2021]

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



## **Extreme Poverty in Djibouti**

### **Preamble**

Djibouti is one of the countries that suffer from extreme poverty despite having advantages of international powers, as it is located between Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea. However, Djibouti's economy remains fragile due to several reasons, the first of which is its heavy dependence on imports from other countries as well as foreign aid and resources including the military bases in Djibouti. This situation has increased Djibouti's level of external debt has naturally affected the citizens and increased internal poverty.

Djibouti's sources of income are very poor and it has few natural resources to depend upon. Djibouti's economy is largely dependant on pastoralism. Djibouti is mostly barren, with little development in the agricultural sector due to the severe droughts that Djibouti suffers from. The volume of its food production is estimated at 3%. In this light, Elizka Relief Foundation presents this intervention to the Special Rapporteur on poverty in Djibouti.

For the first time in two decades, the economic activity in Djibouti has shrunk as a consequence of the Covid-19 global pandemic that hit the world in 2020. It is even expected that the GDP per capita growth will decrease by 0.2% compared to the average annual growth of 2.8% during the period 2012-2022, which tremendously impact the progress in poverty reduction. The resurgence of the pandemic outbreak and the delicate shifts across the Horn of Africa are the main risks to the medium-term outlook as it would undermine the productivity of large infrastructure investments.

### **First: the poverty rate in Djibouti**

Djibouti has been struggling with poverty for so long. Approximately a quarter of a million people in Djibouti need direct assistance, and about 42% of Djibouti's population lives in extreme poverty. With an arid desert climate, Djibouti suffers from water scarcity. The severity of the drought has exacerbated desertification, threatening the food security of more than 75% of the herding families, who live in extreme poverty, as well as the forcibly displaced persons and refugees from neighbouring countries.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the extreme poverty rate in 2020 reached about 15.3%, with people living below the international poverty line on \$ 1.22 per person a day (The international poverty line is \$1.90 a day). With less than 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> suitable for farming, out of its total area of 23,200 km<sup>2</sup>, and an annual rainfall of 5.1 inches, Djibouti has a chronic food deficit. Agricultural production accounts for only three per cent of its GDP, so Djibouti imports 90 per cent of its food commodities. These factors make Djibouti extremely sensitive to external shocks, including the surging prices of food and fuel.

In 2021, the nominal GDP in US dollars was 3.4, the real annual GDP was 1.0, and in terms of per capita GDP, it reached 3.074.4.<sup>2</sup>

### **Second: The repercussions of poverty in Djibouti<sup>3</sup>**

A large number of Djibouti residents suffer from human rights violations, beginning from obtaining the basics of their lives, such as food or drink, until enjoying their inherent rights such as the right to education, or protection against child labour, cruel treatment and sexual assaults during their work. Moreover, some families may get tortured for the mistakes committed by their relatives. In this light, presented hereinafter a number of points that highlight these violations:

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<sup>1</sup> Web, WFP Djibouti Country Brief January 2021, 8 Mar 2021, at <https://2u.pw/VSwL5>.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, Monitoring Global Poverty, at: <https://2u.pw/jCxYa>.

<sup>3</sup> Humanim, Realizing Children's Rights in Djibouti, Available at: <https://2u.pw/RG0xw>.

## **First: children**

Child labour in Djibouti is primarily caused by extreme poverty, as parents force their children to work so that they can survive. Therefore, Djibouti's children are some of the most vulnerable to child labour due to poverty throughout the nation.

Children in Djibouti engage in the worst forms of child labour, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in street work. The minimum age provisions apply only to children who have an official employment contract, which does not comply with international standards. Law enforcement efforts are inadequate to prevent and combat child labour, in part because labour inspectors lack the authority to assess penalties. In addition, the government has made insufficient efforts to enforce laws relating to the worst forms of child labour due to a lack of allocation of financial and human resources and reporting mechanisms.

As a result, over 12% of children ages 5-14 work. Working can isolate children socially or prevent them from having the time to pursue their academic interests.<sup>4</sup>

Despite government efforts to eliminate this phenomenon, there are still many legal loopholes that benefit those who exploit child labour. Many laws are only applicable to children working in the formal business sector, and this indicates that Djibouti's laws are less comprehensive than international standards.

## **Second: Enrollment in primary education rates**

As a result of the extreme poverty that most families in Djibouti live in, especially in rural areas, and their inability to afford the costs of education, it is estimated that the number of children enrolled in the primary stage is only three out of every four children who were enrolled in school. Primary and preparatory education is free, however, other expenditures are often expensive for poor families.

Hence, the total number of children who complete their primary education in Djibouti is estimated at only 60-65%, given that many children are unable to obtain education due to work among other reasons. Child labour in Djibouti perpetuates the cycle of poverty from generation to generation, and the illiteracy rate reaches 61% among women.

Although Djibouti has received international assistance from the UNICEF, which, in cooperation with the Humanitarian Action Project, sought to increase access to education for Djibouti's most vulnerable children (orphans and those living in the poorest areas), the percentage is still high.

## **Third: job opportunities in Djibouti<sup>5</sup>**

The high unemployment rate, which reaches 11.6%, remains a main challenge to the Djiboutian government. And despite the high rate of illiteracy among women in Djibouti, as mentioned earlier, 19% of women work, which suggests that a large number of women suffer from the effects of extreme poverty. The percentage of working women in Djibouti is very small compared to the men, which means that women are not enjoying the same empowerment as men in Djibouti.

There is an urgent need to empower vulnerable poor women who live in the suburbs and rural areas by enhancing their skills and enabling them to establish income-generating activities, and to increase women participation in production, especially through manual work and other works that help to improve their living conditions. Elizka Foundation would like to highlight an example of good practices. Since April 2020, women's groups (totalling 328 women) have produced more than 17,500 masks in the Ali Sabiha and Obock regions. Masks were

<sup>4</sup> Ecoi.Net, 2019 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Djibouti, 30 Sep 2020, Available at: <https://2u.pw/pgYb3>.

<sup>5</sup> The World Bank, New World Bank Funding to Protect the Lives of Djibouti's Poor and Vulnerable and Strengthen Resilience to Economic Shocks 31 Mar 2021, at: <https://2u.pw/7kLJ9>.

distributed in hospitals, training facilities, transportation, and other places in which people are most vulnerable to contract the Covid-19, in an attempt to curb its outbreak.<sup>6</sup>

Elizka Foundation has tracked poverty in Djibouti throughout the recent period, especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and its severe repercussions on the already-depleted Djiboutian economy, which has, in turn, exacerbated poverty and increased the number of sick and injured. All this in light of the lack of appropriate means of prevention due to the lack of financial resources and the extreme poverty from which people suffer. Accordingly, Elizka recommends the following:

- First: The need for the Djiboutian government to put in place strict legislative laws to curb child labour and to limit those violations that children are exposed to. This can be done by issuing a clear and explicit law criminalizing child labour and at the same time appointing a committee responsible for monitoring the law enforcement in Djibouti.
- Second: The government in Djibouti can work to establish small and medium projects in order to reduce the unemployment rate. This can be achieved through providing loans to start-up projects as well as establishing special projects for young people in all regions, especially those suffering from extreme poverty, and allowing them to establish their projects. These loans can be paid back from the revenue of the project, but the nature of the project shall first be determined and a feasibility study shall also be made to ensure its success, and thus unemployment is reduced.
- Third: given Djibouti's heavy dependence on imports, it can solve this problem by exploiting the unused land area through establishing projects on it, and thus attract a large number of women and men to work in these projects and at the same reduce the import.

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<sup>6</sup> USAID, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, 28 Sep 2020, at: <https://2u.pw/CtWwm>.