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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by Aid Organization, 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.

[04 June 2020]

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

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Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the context of COVID-19 and Cyclone AMPHAN

Aid Organization has the honor to submit this statement to the Secretary General on the occasion of the forty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations (UN) Office at Geneva.

Aid Organization is a Bangladesh-based NGO focused on humanitarian, social, and technical assistance¹ work. We mainstream human rights principles throughout our work, which is our interest in participation in the UN Human Rights Council. Aid Organization is making this statement in light of the urgent humanitarian situation in Bangladesh of coping with COVID-19 in the wake of Cyclone Amphan, this being a situation whereby human rights mainstreaming is salient in the face of a two-level crisis.

This statement pertains to *interactive dialogue* whereby the Human Rights Council will consider the *Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/43/3)*,² specifically, the *enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights*,³ *human rights and climate change*,⁴ and paragraph 24, *Civil society space: engagement with international and regional organizations*⁵ and para 38: *Enhancement of technical cooperation and capacity-building in the field of human rights* Given the nature of Aid Organizations normal scope of work addressing the needs of women and children and other vulnerable parties, this written statement also pertains to paragraphs 19 and 20, addressing *violence against women*, and (para. 21) *child, early forced marriage*, (para. 22) *rights of the child*.

In the present moment, we found ourselves *coping with the double-shock of the devastation of Cyclone Amphan, while Bangladesh is already struggling to adjusting to COVID-19 challenges*.

As the Secretary General is well-aware, the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 has overtaken the daily life of many, if not most, persons in the world. On 9 April 2020, in a briefing to the United Nations Security Council, the Secretary General stated that the COVID-19 crisis is the gravest test for the world since the founding of the United Nations. On 22 March 2020, the government of Bangladesh declared the first lockdown, which has been extended to 5 May 2020. In the week ending 11 April 2020, new cases of COVID-19 in Bangladesh grew 1,155 percent, the highest in Asia, ahead of Indonesia with 186 percent. As of 4 June 2020, there are 57,563 active cases in Bangladesh, and 781 persons have died.

Beyond the threat of the virus itself, the economic costs of the lockdown has a devastating impact on the lives of Bangladesh nationals, this compounded by the European and the United States of America (U.S.) lockdown which has already affected the Bangladesh economy. The U.S. and European lockdowns have resulted in Bangladesh factories losing around \$100 million per day. Workers in the garment industry, rickshaw pullers and hourly contract laborers in Bangladesh are hit with loss of income like no other in the face of COVID-19 crisis. In the garments sector alone, Bangladesh has lost around \$1.5 billion in

¹ Aid Organization's work highlights the special needs of women and girls who wish to move out of poverty or from situations of vulnerability or abuse. Since its inception in 1998, Aid Organization has been active in humanitarian and social work in both urban and rural-based settings, succeeding in empowering women and girls, heightening community engagement, and promoting dignity and gainful employment, while reducing health and environmental risks to communities, including risks caused by climate change.

² Paragraph 10. "Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights", Agenda Item 2, A/HRC/44/1 (advance edited version).

³ para 28 Reference is made to the report of the High Commissioner on the implementation and enhancement of international cooperation in the field of human rights (A/HRC/44/28) Agenda Item 2, A/HRC/44/1 (adv. v.).

⁴ Reference is made to the analytical study of OHCHR on the promotion and the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change (A/HRC/44/30).

⁵ Paragraph 24. Reference is made to the report of the High Commissioner on progress made in improving civil society engagement with international and regional organizations (A/HRC/44/25).

canceled orders by foreign brands, which has impacted some 1.2 million workers. On the micro-level, stores selling essential goods are open, yet most businesses are closed. This recalling that Bangladesh is a country of 170 million persons of which only 15 per cent (25.5 million) Bangladeshi workers earn more than \$6 a day. The economic shutdown sparked by COVID-19 has terminated millions of livelihoods in the country. Most people suddenly have no income, savings are disappearing, and with the lockdown many lack food. Solutions are needed for providing capacity building on social distancing, handwashing (“WASH” training), facilitating isolation of the sick, and *developing creative means to social distance in a highly-impacted population* (notably in slum-areas) as coping with providing WASH training for citizens, migrants and refugees, who lack-access to water. Masks and protective equipment are in-need, for medical personnel and for the public at-large. Distribution of food is needed to prevent hunger: the possibility of cash-transfers to the needy is being explored. This bearing in mind that the *lockdown exacerbates situations of violence towards women*, and risks to child rights, as well as creating further challenges to the rights of women and girls to education.

Aid Organization was in the throes of organizing a 200-city project to address these needs, in partnership with our network of NGO partners, and with our partner Ministries in the Government of Bangladesh, when cyclone Amphan hit the continent on 20-21 May 2020. The situation on the grounds, as-from 31May 2020 is as follows: 26 people have died, 1 100 kilometres of roads have been damaged, 350,000 houses have been damaged completely, 176,000 hectares of agricultural crops have been damaged vegetable and fruit, thousands of trees have been uprooted and fish farms worth approximately 37 million US dollars have been damaged. Tidal surges caused the collapse of embankments, inundations of salt water causing a scarcity of safe drinking water and putting the lives of thousands at risk of waterborne diseases.

As confirmed cases of COVID-19 spread, it has the potential to take lives, overwhelm health systems, and trigger lasting geopolitical change. The International Monetary Fund says the global economy now faces its worst downturn since the Great Depression, and Oxfam International has warned that half a billion people could be pushed into poverty. Around the world, desperate efforts are underway to contain what has become a profoundly disruptive outbreak. The developing world and her citizens are at particular risk, and this is true of our home-country, Bangladesh, which is a least developed country (LDC).

We note that our NGO, has commenced with a project partnered with “Save the Children”, focused on provision of humanitarian response to children, facing deprivation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are currently working to expand our efforts, in coordination with our partners in Bangladesh.

We are calling on our prior relationships with the international community, noting our special consultative status before the UN ECOSOC, also our accreditation to UNICEF and UNWOMEN.

We will be contacting donors over the coming weeks, in an effort to be able to make a further impact on this unprecedented situation.

Aid Organization is heartened by the expression of solitary that the Secretary General has made towards the people of Bangladesh. We hope to be able to build on the solitary of the international community so that we can respond to the challenges before us, in a manner that saves lives, and prevents deaths, and allows the people of Bangladesh, including migrants and refugees, to survive and overcome this trying set of events.

We thank the Secretary General for his attention.

This submission also adheres to item no. 3 on the agenda of the 44th Human Rights Council, “Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development: Economic, social and cultural rights”, with specific reference to paragraphs 40, *Extreme poverty and human rights*, and paragraph 41: *Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*.

This statement also pertains to the *interactive dialogue* on the oral update by the High Commissioner on the *Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar*, noted resolution S-27/1 of the Human Rights Council,⁶ also noting paragraph 31 Agenda item 2, which references the human rights of migrants.⁷

⁶ Paragraph 11. “Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar” Agenda Item 2, A/HRC/44/1 (adv. v).

⁷ Paragraph 31, Reference is made to the note of the Secretariat on thereport of the Secretary-General on the human rights of migrants (A/HRC/44/31), Agenda Item 2, A/HRC/44/1 (adv. v).