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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 Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status**

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

[3 February 2019]

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



## **Recommendations to improve the living conditions of children and women in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

For many years, Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society (IAPSRs) has focused on improvement of the quality of life of children and women in deprived neighbourhoods of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Taking into account the social and voluntary activities of IAPSRs regarding fulfilment of essential needs of children and women in the most deprived regions of the country, in this statement recommendations to improve the current situation of women and children are presented. This statement addresses the most important human rights issues faced by IAPSRs over 2018, including child abuse in deprived neighbourhoods, execution of children under the age of 18 who have been convicted for murder, domestic violence against women in deprived settlements, child marriage in deprived neighbourhoods, and finally the condition of children and women after recent sanctions have been imposed on Iran.

### **1. Child Abuse**

Child abuse in all of its formats (e.g. physical, sexual, emotional, and ignorance) is a social phenomenon that is happening all around the world. Children's inability to protect themselves and their vulnerability have made them an easy target for abusers. Children's incapability to report the abuse has intensified this issue. One of the positive steps in providing legal support for children who have been victims or who are in danger of becoming a victim of abuse has been passing the bill of "Supporting Children and Adolescents" in the Parliament. Tremendous efforts of civil organizations in Iran made this possible.

Results of IAPSRs's researches about Child abuse in deprived neighbourhoods of Iran show that child abuse is happening in these areas due to the following factors:

- Chaotic social and livelihood condition of families which leads to inability of the family to protect the child from abusers, and sometimes transforms the family to the abuser itself;
- Social harms of the region which exposes the children to criminals and abusers;
- Poverty and child labour which increase child's vulnerability;
- Negligence of official authorities in these regions which leads to not responding to abuse reports;
- Lack of social and legal support, cultural prejudice and perspectives and lack of education which lead to increased vulnerability of people and normalization of abuse to the extent that even the victim is penalized;
- Distribution and consumption of industrial addictive drugs especially Methamphetamine in deprived neighbourhoods.

Iranian Homes of IAPSRs which are mainly based in marginalized low-income communities, provide children with life skill and child abuse prevention training classes. Moreover, IAPSRs established a committee to investigate and follow up the extreme cases of child abuse in deprived settlements.

Recommendations of IAPSRs for improvement of the conditions of children who are at risk of abuse are as follow:

- Urgent identification of children who live with addicted parents through responsible authorities (e.g. social emergency);
- Proper intervention in the family situation with the aim of mitigation or treatment of effects of abuse;
- Improvement of infrastructures and frameworks of responsible authorities in order to provide supportive services to children who are exposed to abuse or are victims of abuse.

In addition, public media could also be used to educate parents and the public, so that they learn how to prevent and react properly to child abuse. These proper reactions can include creating Child Consultative Council that includes all responsible authorities and NGOs, which are active in children rights.

## 2. Juvenile Delinquency

The Islamic Penal Code of Iran was amended in 2014 and since then, IAPSRS has tried to work on article 91 of this Code for adolescents who have been sentenced to Qisas –a form of punishment in Islamic Law which means retaliation-. According to this article, in respect of crimes punishable by Hudud and Qisas, if the offenders, who are under 18 years old but have reached the age of majority, do not understand the nature of the committed crime or its prohibition, or if there is a doubt in their maturity or cognitive abilities, then, according to their age, they shall be sentenced to one of the alternative punishments provided in this chapter. During the past years, social workers of IAPSRS have faced difficulties in helping teenagers who could be subject of this article. Arbitrary actions by courts with regard to accepting appeal requests in light of article 91 of the new Islamic Penal Code even after judicial precedent of the Supreme Court, and making conflicting decisions by courts in similar cases about adolescents under the age of 18, have left IAPSRS advocates in perplexity and despair several times. During this time, some cases have resulted in satisfying conclusions with the help and support of the Human Rights Section of the Judiciary of Islamic Republic of Iran and also some compassionate people in the Judiciary. In some cases, the requests for appeal were accepted and even the final judgments were in favour of the convicted teenagers. But during this period, we have seen implementation of Qisas too. Since the beginning of its activities to reduce juvenile delinquency, IAPSR has saved 45 people who were about to be executed by obtaining consent of the victim's family or providing money for reaching a settlement.

Recommendations of IAPSRS for improvement of conditions of these children are as follows:

- Developing Restorative Justice Process including programs such as rehabilitation, restitution and community services, aimed at meeting the individual and collective needs and responsibilities of the parties and reintegration of the victim and the offender in the society. Restorative Justice will facilitate conflict resolution and provide appropriate protection to children. Moreover, the role of victims and offenders would be recognized in both the problem and the solution.

## 3. Domestic Violence

Women with lower socioeconomic status who are exposed to substance abuse and live in deprived parts of the city, face so many challenges on a daily basis. In addition to physical abuse, there are many other types of violence that hurt these women with no physical evidence and could lead them to become addicted, which would hurt them and their families even further. Domestic violence seems to only damage half of the population, but the consequences impact everyone in the society.

In November 2018, the bill of "Reassurance of Women's Safety "or "Prohibition of Violence against Women" in Iran reached its final point to be presented at the Parliament. This bill has three key concepts: prohibition, protection, and support. One of the most important parts of this bill is the prohibition of forced marriage of girls and providing safe houses for vulnerable young girls. Even though this bill has not been approved yet, upon approval it would provide support for women who have been abused, and provides measures for fair assessment of domestic violence cases in courts. Based on the provisions of this bill, the current punishment for acid attacks would be doubled.

Domestic violence in marginalized regions stems from many underlying reasons, including economic and cultural poverty, substance abuse and addiction, and women's unawareness about their own rights. Women often endure great suffering and stay in dangerous situations because the current laws and culture don't provide enough support for women facing

domestic violence. Difficult financial situations and their consequent mental clashes could often lead to domestic violence. Girls and boys don't receive any education about conflict resolution and self-control during crisis in their households or schools, which highlights the need for better educational programs.

Iranian Employment Homes of IAPSRs which are based in marginalized low-income communities, provide women with life skill training classes and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the legal committee of IAPSRs deals with extreme domestic violence cases by volunteer lawyers.

Some suggestions of IAPSRs to prevent and control domestic violence are as follows:

- Enacting laws to prohibit violence and provide support for abused women;
- Educating children at younger ages about life skills and anger management in schools;
- Supporting entrepreneurship infrastructures and preventing substance abuse as the underlying causes of domestic violence.

Mainstream media could also be effective in educating families and shaping society's culture to be respectful to women.

#### **4. Child Marriage in Deprived Neighbourhoods:**

In all the years that IAPSRs has been working in poor communities, Child Marriage has always remained one of the biggest problems that children are facing. We have not been able to provide sufficient assistance to these children due to cultural traditions and lack of laws in the judicial system. There are addicted fathers who are trading their children in arranged marriages in exchange for money to spend on drugs. Due to these conditions in deprived communities that are causing disastrous consequences including extreme domestic violence, running away from home, and even attempting to commit suicide, IAPSRs initiated to conduct field investigations to study factors and consequences of child marriage in these deprived communities across the country. The studies show that as we go back a generation we realize that most of child labours are children of parents who themselves got married at young ages. These parents got married due to oppression, lack of maturity, and a false definition of economic cycle in these poor communities which dictates that children are forced to work to provide their needs. In addition, in most of these underprivileged regions, lack of infrastructures for education and public services such as schools lead to deprivation of education and forcing children to marriages. Moreover, the results of the research showed that child marriage is common among Afghan and Pakistani refugees due to the cultural texture and background. Fortunately, after IAPSRs raised this issue during the Child Marriage Seminar, a discourse to discuss this issue was initiated in the society and even it reached to the authorities, decision makers, and members of Parliament. The necessity to improve education infrastructure in these deprived communities and the urgency to develop supportive policies to prevent damages caused by early marriages for children are proposed regarding this issue.

#### **5. Sanctions Imposed on Iran**

Today, people of Iran feel apprehensive about sanctions, chaotic economic conditions, and threats to their security and survival. We are greatly concerned about the future that awaits the children of Iran in a situation that unprecedented, irregular and tough sanctions have been imposed on the country which are even stricter than the sanctions that led to the Oil-for-Food Program in Iraq. In today's world, majority of innocent civilians including innocent children pay the price of ignorance and greed of a few politicians; Iraqi children, Yemeni children, Syrian children, and now Iranian children. In this situation, we are concerned about the safety, physical and mental health of the children living in deprived neighbourhoods. The likelihood of children dropping out of school in deprived neighbourhoods because of the financial restricts imposed by sanctions is increasing, and so is the possibility of them being recruited as child labour forces. One of the challenges that NGOs such as Imam Ali Popular Student Relief Society face in these days is that due to the sanctions, financial difficulties are

spreading poverty and social vulnerabilities. Also arranging independent social activities is more difficult than ever. Local donations are now limited due to people's financial difficulties, and the infrastructure for international financial transactions are not yet established. We hope that United Nations and people of the world pay more attention to Middle-Eastern countries to avoid repeating the catastrophic experiences of the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, and Yemen.

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