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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 Society for Protection of Street & Working Children, 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.

[26 January 2019]

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



Economic Sanctions Target the Most Vulnerable Sectors of Society Including Street Children

Children are the first victims of armed conflicts. Middle East conflicts have had detrimental effects on millions of civilians especially children who are the first group to suffer the unfortunate consequences of war. Recent unrests in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, and Afghanistan have left many children killed, maimed, unaccompanied and/or displaced. The displaced or refugee children move into neighboring countries in search for a better life, and this has been the case for many unaccompanied Afghan children who came to the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) for work, leaving their war-stricken, unstable country to earn a living for their families.

Now, one of the severe challenges of the Islamic Republic of Iran is dealing with forced displacement and trafficking of Afghan children into the country through eastern borders. The unaccompanied children are sent to Iran for child labor through the arrangements and deals made between parents or relatives and human traffickers. Almost all of the trafficked children wander in the streets of large cities and form the vulnerable community of Afghan street children. Being deprived of family and parent's support, living in the outskirts of large cities, the children exposed to various forms of social harms. Therefore, multiple actors, especially Iranian NGOs are trying to take serious steps to support the children by improving their health and living standard.

To guarantee the access of all Afghan children to education, there was a Supreme Leader's order in April 2015 on all schools to enroll Afghan children regardless of their legal status, underlining that no Afghan child, including undocumented or illegal refugees, should be deprived of public education. Following the Order, the number of refugee children who would enroll in Iranian public schools increased annually, and in 2018 the number was seven times higher than the previous year. Currently, approximately 470,000¹ refugee school children are studying in Iranian state-run schools, which include 80 percent of refugee school children. It is promising news, and however, considering the current economic situation of Iran, it imposes a huge cost on the government.

Despite all attempts to send Afghan children to school, currently, they form two-thirds of street children in Iran. Various sectors of the country are trying to address the situation of these children. However, there is still so much to be done. Some NGOs including the Society for Protection of Street & Working Children (SPWSC) which has been helping vulnerable children for years are now doing their best to empower these children.

SPWSC has been active in supporting vulnerable children in Iran for the past 20 years. The organization is entirely independent of the government, totally drawing on the generosity of its donors and capacity of its volunteer members. It has been making persistent untiring efforts to improve the situation of marginalized children to increase the chances for their social inclusion. SPWSC's target group mostly consists of Afghan illegal labor children who are sent to Iran by their families in search for child work and are exposed to various risks in the margins of society. The organization does its best to support the needy and unprivileged children who are deprived of education. SPWSC offers these children with informal teaching, educational and hygiene packs and free medical services as well as literacy and life skills, aiming at the improvement of their physical and mental health. Besides, the organization provides children with occupational training, facilitating the process of bringing them out of the margins of society and integrating them into the normal workforce, so that they can enjoy an adequate standard of living.

Unfortunately, the long-standing efforts of NGOs are now failing to attain the previously set goals since they are confronting with the vast challenges created by the Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCMs) or economic sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran. The comprehensive UCMs have multiple adverse effects on the activities of all civil society members active inside Iran since they shrink all the resources available to donors,

¹ <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/documents/s17294e/s17294e.pdf>

volunteers, NGOs and the vulnerable children who are in desperate need of help. UCMs reduce income for all civilians; therefore, the previously generous NGO donors face a considerable decrease in their financial assets that reduce the financial support of NGOs.

According to Richard Nephew, the designer of UCMs who clarifies the goals of economic sanctions in his book,² sanctions are intended to target the income, employment, and well-being, of all citizens in the target country. Also, inflicting intolerable pain on people, especially the most vulnerable, is mentioned as the aim of sanctions. It seems as if, designers of sanctions neither have concerns for severing sufferings of civilians nor care for the number of lives that would be lost due to lack of access to vital items including food and medicine, among all the hardship that the targeted people will tolerate. The on-the-ground reality, proven by the experiences of local NGOs is that economic sanctions jeopardize the life and health of all ordinary people especially the vulnerable groups including street children, children with chronic disease, women, patients, people with disabilities and the poor. Since the main factor that causes children to work is poverty, the UCMs worsen the situation for the street children.

Also, the imposition of sanctions escalates the cost of medicine and medical health and severely limits the access of vulnerable children to healthcare. As an example, we would like to refer to the case of a dentist who would offer free treatment to street children under the support of SPWSC. The dentist announced that the price of material and equipment required for treatments have considerably increased, and the chances of offering free treatments to the children are reducing.

Recommendations:

Since the UCMs are shrinking all the resources available to NGOs, SPWSC calls on the international community to unanimously condemn the imposition of UCMs that lead to a violation of almost all human rights of vulnerable groups including the street children's right to health, and right to food and medical care and living standard.

Being over-concerned with the high-risk situation of Afghan street children in Iran in the absence of their families, multiplied by UCMs, SPWSC calls on Iran government to fortify its efforts to address their deteriorating situation of the children and consider the possibility of joining them to their families.

SPWSC also calls on Iran government to consistently prevent the trafficking of children especially Afghan children into Iran through blocking the borders.

SPWSC urges the UN human rights council to hold war-waging countries that destabilized Afghanistan accountable for all the sufferings of vulnerable children adversely affected by armed conflicts, including child refugees.

The annual education costs for Afghan children studying in Iran is around 150 million US dollars, a tiny portion of which is provided by international organizations. Therefore, further support of the international community is needed to improve the situation of these refugees and protect them against social harms.

² Nephew, Richard. (2018). *The Art of Sanctions: A View from the Field*. New York: Columbia University Press