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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.


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Report the General Situation of Afghan Children in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Peace and justice are universal issues. Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society (IAPSRs) believes that true happiness is achieved when no child suffers in any corner of the world. In recent years, war, religious extremism and ethnic conflicts have given rise to a multitude of problems in Afghanistan. As the most vulnerable groups, women and children have had to suffer a great deal as the result. Destruction caused by war, lack of security, unemployment, shortage in the fundamental infrastructures for living, and the low index of human development (in education and health) has made emigration an inevitable choice for many people in this country. Language, religious and cultural commonalities have made the Islamic Republic of Iran one of the chief destinations for Afghan emigrants over the past years. Based on the statistics, over two million Afghan immigrants live in Iran. These are social issues in today's society which Afghan children are facing:

Education of children

It is now over five years since the legislation has passed to officially recognize the right to free education for Afghan children. With the implementation of this legislation, there has been a noticeable development in educational resources and opportunities for Afghan children, and a greater number of children have had access to education. Despite the growth in the number of children who have access to schools, there are still obstacles to the education of the children in many regions. Unusual and unaffordable registration fees in certain schools, and the limitation in physical capacity and resources for schools in some regions are all among the issues that call for fundamental solutions. It should be noted that some traditional cultural views often result in children, and particularly girls, to drop out of school. Among certain ethnic groups, girls go to school only up to a certain age, after which they have no option but forced marriage. The intervention of local facilitators to educate community leaders about the adverse effects of illiteracy and child marriage may be one of the promising approaches to mitigate this issue.

Child labour

A great number of children engage in garbage scavenging from an early age, in order to help earn money for their family. This occupation, which is one of the riskiest instances of child labour, is becoming increasingly prevalent. The children spend hours on end every day to collect garbage on the streets, or else work long hours in waste recycling workshops. In addition to their deprivation of their childhood, the adverse working conditions expose these child labourers to numerous health and safety hazards. Lack of appropriate supervision over the recycling contractors gives rise to further possibilities for abuse of these children. Apart from scavenging, young boys often work in construction projects, workhouses, or on streets. It seems that developing effective measures to prevent emigration from the point of origin along with empowerment programs at the point of origin could pave the path for eventual end to scavenging among immigrant children. In a seminar focused on the kids scavenging on rubbish dumps, filed research data on the life and working conditions of 700 scavenger children collected and reported. Throughout the seminar, the living condition of these children was analysed, and serious demands were discussed with the responsibilities of the executive and supervisory authorities.

In the case of Afghan girls, different kinds of child labor take place. Many immigrant girls are forced by their parents to work on streets or at home, often to help pay the household expenses. Sell flowers and other goods on the street, wash car glasses on streets, shelling nuts, peeling onions, and assembling small industrial appliances are just a few examples of the forced labour imposed on girls. Social isolation and deprivation from opportunities for education and happiness are only a few consequences these children suffer through such forms of child labour.

Health and medical issues

The undesirable and substandard living conditions along with the lack of adequate medical resources (both in the countries of origin and destination) leads to high rate of diseases among Afghan families living in Iran. Due to the high health insurance premiums, most Afghan families in Iran are not covered by any health insurance. This has created considerable challenges in providing health check-ups and required medical care for these families. Medical expenses for some of the immigrant Afghan children is paid through popular donations.

Child marriage

Child marriage is an established tradition among some Afghan ethnic groups, and local traditions continue to encourage parents and children to do so regardless of the damaging consequences of it in today's society. This tradition promotes the vicious cycle of poverty in the community; the children are forcibly thrown into adulthood and are compelled to face with its challenges without the necessary social, mental and emotional preparation, as they have been robbed of experiencing the joy of childhood and of adequate education.

Since its formation, Imam Ali Society has taken an inclusive cultural approach to support children, and has put every effort to develop a variety of projects, programs and social activities to provide support to affected Afghan women and children in the Society's local centres ('Iranian Homes'). Given the support priorities of the Society in suburban areas, Afghan women and children are one of the major target population for Iranian Homes. Many uncertainties concerning the living conditions of Afghan families in Iran poses certain challenges to the development of precise plans for empowering such families. Nonetheless, IAPSRs puts its best efforts to pursue its social responsibility through various strategies to raise awareness, provide support, and voice the required demands. At present, Iranian Homes are implementing educational programs for the empowerment and self-awareness of over 1000 Afghan children.

By the efforts of the education and social work teams of IAPSRs, hundreds of kids have successfully enrolled in public schools, where they are also supported by the educational team of each centre according to their needs. Moreover, there are older kids in Iranian households who need, due to their age, to be targeted by literacy courses and programs. Learning artistic activities such as painting, handicrafts, theatre and music are undertaken in the centers as rehabilitative tools for enriching their self-confidence and for their psychic and spiritual empowerment. Afghan kids participate in the Persian sport teams. They have succeeded, relying on their own hard work and enthusiasm to achieve new levels of self-development and personal and effective management. Medical support for women and children is seriously undertaken by IAPSRs. These medical supports include a variety of engagements from simple consulting services to a full conduct of hospitalization of kids and women. The Iranian Medical House with the cooperation of social workers and volunteer physicians and dentists has become a site for free dentistry and rehabilitation visits for refugee children and women.

Social issues of Afghan women and children in Iran have always been motivating concerns for the volunteers of IAPSRs. A significant portion of the collected field data which have constituted the subject matter of research conferences in the field of children's and women's issues, pertain to Afghan children and women.

IAPSRs believes that any comprehensive solution to the issues of immigrants must involve putting an end to violence and extremism and spreading altruism at the global level.