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SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS:MINORITIES

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, 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.

[31 January 2005]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was bestowed upon mankind on the 10th of December 1948, with the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal inalienable rights of all members of the human family being the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

The 30 Articles of the said declaration are the fundamentals of “all human rights for all”. None of the Articles are ignorable. No country has the right to disregard any of the articles because of national laws, customs, tradition or religion. And yet, sadly almost all countries of the world disregard or violate one or more of the articles of the said Declaration.

Sadly though, four years into the new century and millennium, the world today is not a better or safer world than any other period in the history of mankind. Terrorism, wars and conflicts, poverty, diseases, hunger are still strife in all corners of the world. One of the several groups that is vulnerable to one or more of these are religious and ethnic minorities.

Yet again in 2004, we witnessed religious sectarian attacks in Pakistan. Shia Muslim mosques were attacked and several worshippers killed. In previous statements the ODVV urged the Pakistani government to take necessary measures to prevent these kinds of attacks from taking place, but sadly it seems that the government has not done enough to protect its own citizens.

The invasion of Iraq and its subsequent occupation and continued foreign troop presence following the handover of power at the end of June last year, has left the country in a state of anarchy and lawlessness. Insurgents continue to wreak havoc, death and destruction across Iraq in almost every town and city.

We witnessed daily terror attacks across the whole of the country. Gruesome images of hostage beheadings were broadcast by the evil thugs in their websites, thugs that have absolutely no regard for life. We were all proven this fact when we saw humanitarian activist Margaret Hassan taken hostage and finally being brutally murdered.

Again last year and in Iraq, we saw specific terrorist attacks on the Christian community in Iraq. Five churches were bombed in a coordinated dawn attack. Luckily there were no casualties, but the Christian places of worship were damaged extensively.

Due to the extensive media coverage of all terror attacks, and hostage beheadings, the rest of the world is inadvertently receiving the wrong interpretation of Islam. The Muslim world as a whole has nothing good to say about terrorists and or insurgents who have no regard for individuals, irrelevant of their background (Margaret Hassan). The average person in the West is mistakenly seeing Islam as a violent religion that has no regard for human life.

In Sudan, a clear state-backed campaign of terror and ethnic cleansing was in progress for the best part of 2004. Government backed Arab militias continued to forcefully drive the people of the Darfur region out of their homes, villages and towns. Why? Because they were different!

In Thailand, in late April last year, a group of Muslim extremists launched attacks on police stations. In the ensuing battle over a hundred attackers, and a number of police and others died.

Sectarian violence also showed its face in several EU countries. In Spain the Madrid rail bombings, drove the terrifying message that even Europe was not safe from

fundamentalist terror attacks. In France, Jewish and Muslim cemeteries were desecrated in the most appalling way. In Holland film director and direct descendant of the famous painter Vincent Van Gogh was shot and stabbed to death by Islamic fundamentalist, because of a documentary that he made about women in Islamic society. This resulted in several Islamic schools and mosques being attacked and set on fire.

This is sadly due to the actions of individuals that are nothing but a tiny speck in the vast Muslim world.

In Russia there was the suicide bombing in Moscow, two passenger planes were blown up over the Russian skies, and the most brutal act of terrorism took place in the southern Russian town of Belsan, where a school full of students, parents and teachers was taken hostage by terrorists. The siege ended with the death of hundreds of innocent children and adults

The actions of these thugs, for they are nothing but, have resulted in the Muslims and other ethnic minorities to suffer tremendously in Western countries. The same can be said about the rise in Anti-Semitism in the West. This is directly due to the brutal actions of the Israeli regime in the Occupied Territories.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the 25 years following the Islamic Revolution, the situation of religious minorities has to some extent improved. Freedom of holding religious ceremonies, freedom to religious education in native tongues, equality in Diah with the Muslims, are some of the achievements of this section of the Iranian society. Issues such as Ghesas (retribution), inheritance, employment in the civil service sector and the armed forces, discrimination in higher level education (university), however are issues that the Iranian government can easily correct with the help of local and national non-governmental organizations.

As a non-governmental human and citizen's rights organization, the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence declares its readiness and willingness to work closely with all the sides concerned to remove these problems.

The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), believes that only in the shadows of peace, justice and respect to the identities of other ethnic and religious groups, can there be a world free of war and conflict in the future.

We at the ODVV urge all governments to observe the contents of UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (36/55, Adopted on 25 November 1981), and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (47/135, Adopted on 18 December 1992).

The ODVV calls upon the United Nations to seriously consider all the mentioned facts, and to take prompt and effective measures in ensuring that ethnic and religious minorities are protected in all countries that they live in. The UN must play its role, as it was envisioned by those who nurtured the idea for its existence.
