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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 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.

[24 August 2011]

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

The conditions of Afghan refugees in Iran

Introduction:

The refugee phenomenon in Iran – Afghan refugees in particular – due to their sheer number and diversity and also their income and basic problems, are issues that dealing with which require special measures and specific executive approaches. On one hand the prolonged stay of Afghan refugees in Iran and the existence of social, cultural and economic problems in proportion with the general conditions of the country are deliberative and on the other hand the continuation of the unstable conditions in Afghanistan who is still not ready to repatriate its refugees (according to released figures), have openly and secretly made refugees problems more complex.. in a way while deepening past issues, the emergence of other social realities which are linked to the greater policies of the country such as the removal of subsidies have escalated the refugees problems.

According to published figures from the Afghan refugees registration programme Amayesh 6¹ by the Interior Ministry's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA), the number of registered Afghan refugees in Iran is over one million. Also according to the Iraqi refugees registration programme there are approximately 42,000 Iraqis in Iran. This is while nearly 2 million Afghan nationals are illegally residing in Iran.

Refugees' Repatriation:

For a long time the repatriation of refugees as a lasting solution has been in the working agenda of the Iranian and Afghan governments and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. To this aim and following the improvement of security in Afghanistan and the formation of the world recognized Afghan government, and Afghan refugees from various countries that included Iran showed interest in repatriation, in 2002 the first trilateral agreement was signed between the UNHCR, the Iranian and Afghan governments. According to this agreement all three provide services in support of the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Iran, and these assistances still continue on. But gradually in view of the failure in the fulfillment of the expectations of the returnees, this process has slowed down to an extent where in 2010 only 10,000 refugees repatriated to their country.

From the start of the voluntary repatriation programme to date 1.8 million Afghan refugees have voluntarily returned to Afghanistan with the assistance of UNHCR. Approximately 880,000 of these returned with the assistance of the UNHCR in Iran and also 22,000 Iraqi refugees returned to Iraq with the assistance of UNHCR.

Refugees Income Situation in Iran:

One of the challenges in the way of the income of refugees in Iran is the lack of approved jobs for them. Although in comparison with countries from which refugees have flooded into Iran, Iran has better employment conditions, nonetheless with the existence of different laws and regulations, refugees' lack of awareness of the laws and regulations in obtaining temporary work permits, high costs and employment restrictions, the Afghan refugees are struggling with their income in the country. Furthermore livelihood assistance provided by donor countries is not enough, and these assistances haven't been able to solve refugees' problems.

¹ Currently the distribution of Amayesh 7 cards for Afghan refugees and Amayesh 6 cards for Iraqi refugees programme is underway.

Education Situation of Refugees:

Undoubtedly in view of the stress of international laws that include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the subject of education in planning and policy setting of support services for refugees is one of the pivotal and determining indicators, and therefore education of refugees children in particular must be top priority in the activities of member states and national and international organizations.

By paying a part of their education costs, presently legal Afghan refugees in Iran can register in Iranian schools and study. Although the fees compared to the paid share of the government may be trivial, and in some instances the Iranian government gives exemptions from payment for vulnerable refugees, but overall there are refugees that have great difficulties in paying the low costs and are not included in the exemptions list of the government. In the long run this affects the education situation of the refugees, therefore further participation of international organizations in assisting refugees and the Iranian government for the provision of free education is very necessary.

Health and Medical Care Situation of Refugees in Iran:

Currently refugees that suffer from three particular sicknesses of hemophilia, Thalassemia, and diabetes, are covered by the Islamic Republic of Iran's Social Security Organization with the support of the UNHCR. Although considering that the majority of refugee families are not able to provide the medical bills for their members who suffer from other chronic diseases, therefore with the initiative of the UNHCR and the backing of the Iranian government in the current year the commendable supplementary medical insurance programme has been put into effect. This programme, which the UNHCR provides 42% of the cost of refugees' insurance cards, can solve a lot of the medical treatment problems that refugees face due to financial difficulties. In this programme vulnerable individuals can receive free insurance services.

This programme following the cutting of energy and necessary goods subsidies which had a negative effect on the social and economic situation of vulnerable refugees, was a positive step towards the protection of refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Recommendations:

While valuing the worthy services of the Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the biggest host countries to refugees, international organizations, the UNHCR in particular and particularly donor countries that include Japan, the EU and the positive steps that these institutions have taken to solve refugees' problems in Iran, we recommend the following:

1. In view of the existence of some sanctions against Iran which has affected the income situation of Iranians as well as refugees, it is necessary for humanitarian measures to replace political actions and for international organizations to react towards pressures that result in the violation of citizen's rights and rights of refugees directly or indirectly.
2. It is necessary for self-sufficient projects to be implemented extensively for further support for refugees, particularly the vulnerable ones during their stay in Iran.
3. Support for refugee producing countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq for the purpose of repatriation of refugees to their countries and furthering assistance for the returnees can be a sustainable solution. In spite of all the problems that refugees face in Iran, their repatriation has not been successful because they have had better access to welfare, security and health systems than their own countries.