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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.

[15 February 2012]

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

The situation of Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Introduction

According to current existing figures, there are approximately one million Afghan and fifty thousand Iraqi refugees living in Iran, there's another further 2 million Afghans living illegally in Iran. These people are faced with various problems the major one of which is economic problems. Due o the lack of compensation systems in the spending cuts of the government and international organizations and also the lack of expected support by nongovernmental organizations, and or the miniscule amount of services they get, the refugees living conditions have been kept in very low levels. International sanctions against Iran, the fixing of subsidies at the national level and the low amount of international aid with consideration of the number of refugees can also be pointed out.

Women refugees

Women refugees compared to their male counterparts are more vulnerable against various types of exploitation. Women refugees who have left their country for various problems that include pressures by the Taliban, economic poverty, and the occupation of their country have been forced to leave their homes and poured into Iran, more than any other group are subjected to rape, physical violence, sexual abuse, and forced to prostitution. Even those Afghan women refugees that are protected by men in view of cultural backgrounds many families are faced with restrictions and often subjected to domestic violence, violence that the abused as well as the abuser are not aware of.

Women heads of household are the most vulnerable among women; women who, due to factors such as divorce, death and or the addiction, him being jobless, being abandoned by men refugees, have caused this vast group of the refugees community in Iran to be very vulnerable. These women are faced with several problems and obstacles which alongside living in big cities irreparable damages are inflicted on them. Socially and legally they are faced with numerous problems and they become depressed far quicker than other women in society, and suffer from a lot of mental and physical problems.

In view of the problems and difficulties of this group, and an accurate and comprehensive review of their problems and presentation of proper solutions for their protection are challenges that for various reasons such as the lack of financial resources, not enough NGOs that are able to give them assistance.

Refugee children

In the present conditions and due to various reasons that include economic pressures, a major part of which is as a result of sanctions against Iran, refugee children who are forced onto the streets to earn a living are more under threat than any other groups of society. The living conditions of this group of children, particularly in the early years of development are such that deep physical, emotional and mental scars are inflicted on them. According to UNICEF street children are faced with the bitter truth of separation from their families, and dangers of losing fundamental amenities such as health and education.

Without a doubt the presence of refugee children in the streets and or illegal workshops, particularly on the outskirts of cities which are kept hidden from the law, play a crucial role in the spread of behavioural disorders among them and not only the Iranian society but also the Afghan society will be affected by this in the future. In this regard Afghan children who do not have ID or residency cards in Iran are the most vulnerable.

Refugee repatriation

One of the most fundamental solutions for refugees, particularly Afghan refugees living in Iran is their repatriation to their country which the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran insists on, and so do the Afghan government and the UNHCR. But what has taken place more than anything is the low number of those that repatriate which is due to several reasons such as the lack of necessary infrastructures in Afghanistan in employment wise, and the lack of enough protection. Although the repatriated figures in comparison to previous years, which is just below 20,000, has seen relative increase, but this increase has not been due to changes in existing variables, but it's mainly been due to economic pressures on the refugees community.

Furthermore, the tendency towards dialogue with the Taliban, and the creation of conditions for their renewed presence in Afghanistan has increased the Iranian Afghan community's concern twice fold, and has turned into another new obstacle in the way of their voluntary repatriation.

Recommendations and suggestions

- Support of national and international NGOs active in Iran – by international organizations – who work on the protection of women refugees, heads of household in particular, for the expansion of the protection umbrella among the vulnerable groups, and especially their empowerment, is very important and necessary.
 - Help international organizations for the creation of suitable mechanisms towards the support and protection of the rights of refugee children, particularly those children who have lost their parents because of war and homelessness is very necessary.
 - The appearance of economic pressures as a result of sanctions have not only affected Iranians but specifically affected the refugee community, which requires humanitarian organizations to show appropriate reaction towards.
 - Attention to cultural issues, particularly cultural poverty of the refugees community, and discriminatory and unfair attitudes towards women, necessitates planning for the purpose of correcting the wrong cultural structure, particularly in instances where women's rights are violated, in the heart of the refugees community, and also drawing of necessary support for this is very necessary.
 - More attention towards the demands of the people of Afghanistan, and also attention to the consequences of the presence of the Taliban and other extremist groups in the body of the Afghan government.
 - Support in the reconstruction of Afghanistan in a serious way by the United Nations and other international organizations can sooth a small part of the pain of the suffering groups
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