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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 Al-khoei Foundation, 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.

[22 August 2014]

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

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Action Against Racism: Islamophobia and the Racism of Extremist Groups

The Al-khoei Foundation is an international charitable organisation, founded in 1989 by the late Ayatollah Al-Khoei, which has had General Consultative Status with ECOSOC since 1998. The Foundation works to promote freedom of religion, tolerance, respect and justice for religious groups and ethnic minorities worldwide and actively supports all initiatives that foster peaceful co-operation and friendship between different religious and ethnic groups.

One of the most fundamental beliefs of the Al-khoei Foundation is to undertake our activities with the utmost respect for all peoples involved, regardless of their background, ethnicity, race or faith. It saddens us greatly that racism is still such a pervasive and ugly feature of many societies across the globe, and we find it alarming that in some instances racism is greatly increasing and gaining momentum. We are especially concerned about two forms of racism which are particularly troubling; the first is Islamophobia, which can be found particularly in the Western world where it adversely affects Muslim minorities living in Western countries; the second is the rise of violent extremist groups, such as the Islamic State (IS) who promote a sectarian, violent and ultimately racist ideology which manifests in frequent attacks against religious and ethnic minorities. As a Foundation committed to interfaith and intrafaith work built on the pillars of mutual respect, trust, cooperation and understanding, we do not condone any racist acts - whether violent or discriminatory - and deplore the violent and sectarian ideologies of other extremist groups. We aim to be a beacon of tolerance and respect towards other peoples.

In the modern world misunderstandings between the West and Islam have been all too pervasive and have followed many Muslims living in Western countries, manifesting in a specific kind of racism - Islamophobia. Many Muslims are angry by what they see as the Western media's portrayal of Islam; widely-held beliefs tend to portray Islam in a negative light, sadly taking the actions of an extremist and intolerant minority to be the premise of the peaceful religion of Islam, followed by around 1.6 billion people throughout the world. These wrongly held views and the demonisation of Muslims are leading to an alienation of Muslim communities as minorities in the West. For many young Muslims, fear and distrust of Islam is an everyday reality. Coverage of social, economic and political problems, such as immigration and education, has added to a sense of isolation. In some cases, such as numerous attacks on mosques in the UK, these underlying beliefs may manifest in a violent attack.

In order to tackle these misconceptions of Islam and Muslims, the Al-khoei Foundation is committed to participating in and sponsoring many interfaith and intrafaith initiatives at local, national and international levels. The Foundation is a committed signatory of international faith declarations such as the Amman Message (2004) and the "A Common Word" initiative (2007). We work hard to raise standards and promote interfaith dialogue in national forums in the UK, such as the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) and have helped spearhead initiatives such as the Iraqi Council for Interfaith Dialogue in Iraq.

By reaching out with interfaith and secular actors throughout the world, we believe we are actively challenging racist stereotypes and integrating our own community more deeply into the interfaith world. By demonstrating the true peaceful interpretation of Islam, speaking out against those who encourage negative stereotypes and perceptions of Islam through their violent and extremist actions, and increasing dialogue and understanding between other religious actors, we strive to embody both an attitude devoid of racism and a challenge to those who hold racist ideas about Islam and Muslims and provide an alternative message that can, in the long term, replace Islamophobia itself.

As well as the entrenched racism of Islamophobia, the Al-khoei Foundation is also very concerned by the systematic attacks of the Islamic State on various racial, ethnic and religious minorities that seem to form part of a coherent plan to ethnically cleanse controlled areas from certain demographics within the population.

Numerous statistical reports have indicated a death toll of religious minorities to exceed 5,500 since the dawn of the recent IS crisis on June 7. The State conducts targeted attacks on religious minority groups such as the Shia Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, as well as attacks on ethno-religious peoples such as the Shabak and the Turkmen.

Attacks on the Shia Muslim population are plenty. IS is guilty of conducting mass executions of captive Shias, for example, in Tikrit, 180 kilometres south of Baghdad on June 11. It is said that the victims of another mass killing in Kirkuk, June 16, consisted of at least 40 Shia Turkmen, including children. Such attacks are few amongst many of blatant discrimination and hostility towards the Shia. IS is also guilty of the desecration of 13 Shia mosques and shrines in an area outside Mosul between June 24 and July 2, and destroyed nine Shia mosques and shrines in Tal Afar between June 25 and July 2. Several reports also suggest continuous targeting towards Shias from the ethnic Shabak community. This can be seen between June 13 to July 10, 83 Shia Shabaks had been kidnapped from Gogjali, a neighbouring village to Mosul, by IS members. Days later, seven bodies were found dead, with the rest remaining missing.

Additionally, IS has used various other methods to target other groups. The ancient Christian population in Mosul has been a victim of the enforced 'jizya' tax. The properties of Christians (as well as Shia Shabak and Turkmen, and Yazidis) have had marks placed on the doors to readily identify and persecute them. IS has also targeted such minorities, ordering them to "repent" and convert, pay the jizya tax, or alternatively face death. Reports from various sources suggest up to 100,000 Christians have fled their homes due to the threat posed by IS.

The Foundation strongly condemns the targeted attacks on the followers of Iraq's oldest religion, the Yazidi people. According to some estimates, up to 70,000 people, 15% of Iraq's Yazidi population have been forced to flee the country to seek asylum elsewhere due to persecution. Some 40,000 Yazidis have been forced to flee to nine different locations on Mount Sinjar, where food, water, medical supplies and other basic living needs are scarce. The reasoning behind the persecution of the Yazidi population is to supposedly 'purify' the population of 'impure' humans.

The Al-khoei Foundation believes such attacks are racially motivated and are targeted specifically at particular minority groups in Iraq. Statements from IS members suggest a strong anti-minority rhetoric, and the intolerance of religious and ethnic diversity.

We call upon states and societies to continue to eradicate racism and discrimination in all their forms, whilst paying sensitive attention to the ongoing trend of Islamophobia that blights life for Muslims living in many Western societies and misconstrues the true meaning of Islam and inhibits understanding, dialogue and trust between the majority of Muslims and other international actors. We also call upon states, societies and religious leaders to continue to speak out against the Islamic State and their racist, oppressive and violent state, and to take proactive and practical measures to protect the religious and ethnic minorities of Iraq and Syria.