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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 Alulbayt Foundation, 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.

[25 August 2014]

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

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Hostility Against Minorities in the Middle East

The AlulBayt Foundation is international religious, educational and interfaith organisation founded in 1998 with its head quarters in London. We participate in and organise a number of intrafaith initiatives which aim to strengthen the ties of the diverse cultures and schools of thought within the Islamic community. The Foundation works with local governments and NGOs in conjunction with local bodies, service providers, civic institutions and amnesty driven relief organisations to further its aims.

The AlulBayt Foundation is particularly concerned about two forms of hostilities against minorities. The first is the growth of the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State' (IS) extremist group, which since forming as an offshoot of Al-Qaeda has systematically targeted both religious and ethnic minorities in the region, such as Christians, Yazidis and Shia Muslims. We recognise that IS are by no means the sole threat to civilians in the area and that other terrorist groups are also a threat. However, we would like to highlight the plight of the minorities who have been subjected to IS' barbaric and inhumane acts and we believe that they pose an ongoing and incredibly dangerous threat to minorities in Syria, Iraq and in other close countries such as Lebanon.

Shia Muslims have become a primary target by IS. We have found that throughout IS controlled areas there have been numerous cases of systematic ethnic cleansing towards the Shia community. IS view the Shia as heretics, falsely attributing the Shia sect of Islam to be polytheistic, and are actively attempting to rid them from the areas they control. In Iraq IS has been guilty of conducting mass executions of captured Shias, the massacre in Tikrit on June 11 being one example.

Additionally, the targeting of the Turkmen Shia minority group, indigenous to areas in the north and west of Iraq, has been active and violent, with IS reaching many Shia Turkmen villages and committing massacres in many areas such as Birmageli, Telafar, Qozrobat (Al-Sa'diya) and Bashir. IS has brutally attacked villages surrounding Amerli, killing civilians, burning dead bodies and assaulting women, children and the elderly; more than 4,000 people have reportedly had to flee their homes which were burnt alongside mosques and schools, and the town been under siege since IS arrived in the area. It is said that the victims of another mass killing in Kirkuk, June 16, consisted of dozens of Shia Turkmen, including children. These examples are just a few of the many instances of extreme violence and hostility towards the Shia.

Beyond the Shias, IS have targeted and killed many members of other minority religious groups such as the ethnic Yazidi minority and Iraq and Syria's Christian population. The AlulBayt Foundation fully condemns the targeting of the Yazidi community, and was shocked by the brutality inflicted on the community, which numbers around 800,000 members, after IS occupied the Yazidi town of Sinjar in northern Iraq in early August 2014. The trapping of Yazidi civilians on Mount Sinjar was a brutal and humanitarian catastrophe and led to the inhumane starving of innocent men, women and children.

The Christians of Iraq are considered one of the oldest surviving and continuous Christian communities in the world, dating back almost 2,000 years. From July 14, 2014, a number of homes in Mosul were painted with the letter 'N' (ن) in Arabic) for Nasrani (the Arabic word for Christian), allowing IS fighters to easily identify Christian families in the city. In Iraq, Christians are demanded to convert to Islam or risk death, and the killing of Christians by IS has already been documented. Sources inside the Syrian Orthodox Church have reported that an "ongoing ethnic cleansing of Christians" is being carried out by the Free Syrian Army in Homs, with Christians being expelled without their belongings and the confiscation of their homes. As a result, the Christian population of Homs has decreased from 160,000 to about 1,000.

On top of civilian casualties, IS systematically attacks places of worship. IS views Shia places of worship to be centres of polytheist preaching and deviant belief and frequently damage and destroy them. This includes the desecration and

harm done to thirteen Shia and Sufi mosques and shrines near Mosul between June 24 and July 2, and the destruction of nine Shia mosques and shrines in Tal Afar between June 25 and July 2. Since the ISIS occupation of northern Iraq, a number of prominent and historical Christian churches have been targeted and burnt, whilst others have been converted into regional headquarters for ISIS fighters. On July 22, 2014 ISIS militants seized Mar Behnam, a 4th century monastery run by the Syriac Catholic church near the town of Qaraqosh in Northern Iraq and expelled the monks inside. This is but some of the damage being inflicted upon the heritage and active religious centres of many communities.

On July 24, 2014 Ayatollah Sistani and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon jointly condemned the grave human rights violations against civilians, places of worship, religious leaders and atrocities in the areas controlled by the Islamic State and called on citizens to strengthen the bonds between each other by preaching peace, love and unity. The AlulBayt Foundation condemns the attacks, discrimination, persecution and violence perpetuated by IS to multiple minorities in the Middle East and has worked hard to establish solidarity with displaced Yazidi and Christian refugees, including by the opening of doors to displaced persons in the Shia holy cities of Karbala and Najaf.

As well as deep concern over the actions of IS in Iraq and Syria, we are also troubled by the ongoing structural and political hostilities against minorities in many countries throughout the world, including the targeting of Shia Muslim minorities in particular. In Pakistan, the Hazara community have continually been victims of a sharp rise in sectarian violence and ethnic cleansing, leading to the targeted killings of over 1,000 civilians since 2012. The Shia Muslim minority worldwide, although a majority of the population in Bahrain, still face severe repression and discrimination, including destruction to Shia places of worship in Bahrain. In Saudi Arabia, the Shia minority is regularly subjected to discrimination on sectarian and ideological grounds, including employment, judicially, the right to worship publicly, eligibility for public office and by being subjected to accusations of ‘heresy’. On July 8, 2012, Ayatollah Nimr Baqir al-Nimr was arrested on the grounds of “inciting unrest” for his leading role in the 2011-2012 Saudi Arabian protests. He is due to be sentenced shortly, where he faces the prospect of life imprisonment or execution.

We are particularly concerned about the treatment of Shia Muslims in Malaysia where Shia Islam as a labelled a “deviant” ideology in eleven of Malaysia’s fourteen states. According to sources, there have been crackdowns against the Shia community since 1997, with Shias facing arbitrary arrest, attacks on private property and the prohibition of publishing and distributing Shia Islamic materials. In Indonesia, Shia Muslims are being increasingly subjected to discrimination on the grounds of their religion and beliefs, as well as violations of their human rights. In recent years, these communities have increasingly been subjected to laws, fatwas and regulations that restrict their right to practice their religion, as well as their freedoms of expression and opinion.

Accordingly, there are a number of additional suggestions we would like to make to the following parties:

To the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues:

- To continue to speak out for the rights of all minorities, whether religious, racial or other, who are victims of ongoing persecution, violence and human rights violations.
- To call for deeper investigation into the situations of the peoples we have highlighted in this statement as experiencing human rights violations as a result of their minority status.
- To work to ensure that at the international level IS are recognised as a severe and ongoing threat to multiple minority groups who could well continue or increase their campaigns against vulnerable minorities in the Middle East region.

To States:

- To protect and find ways to enshrine respect for minority groups within their country.
- To pass legislation criminalising any forms of hostilities against minority groups that links to their minority status, from violent manifestations of hostilities through to discrimination and withholding of human rights.

- To declare all places of worship and sacred sites, including those belonging to minority religions, to be inviolable neutral ground at all times and not to be threatened, damaged or desecrated but instead protected and preserved.
 - To call for thorough investigations into reported human rights violations against minority groups occurring within their country.
 - To recognise that minority groups in the Middle East, specifically Iraq and Syria at the present time, are worryingly vulnerable to the ongoing destruction wrought by the Islamic State (IS).
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