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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, 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.

[13 February 2017]

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

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Situation in Northern Syria

At the end of 2016, fighting in the city of Aleppo in the North of the Syrian Arab Republic came to an end. During the fight for Aleppo many refugees found shelter in the Syrian-Kurdish enclave of Afrin. The civilian population in Aleppo and to an even larger extent in Afrin barely receives humanitarian help. In the relatively small area of Afrin the situation of civilians is growing more difficult by the day. The international community must ensure that groups that foster a radical version of Islam who persecute ethnic and religious minorities such as Assyrians-Arameans-Chaldeans, Armenians, Christians and Yazidi do not receive support. UN institutions must urgently start negotiations with the government of Turkey in order to end the border blockade to Northern Syria. There is a lack of support for the civilian population. In the refugee camp Robar in the Kurdish region of Afrin a 15-day old baby died of hypothermia. The mountainous region has seen snowfall for a while, and the refugees are forced to live in barely heated tents and emergency shelters.

Afrin is almost completely cut off the outside world. Armed Islamist groups keep blocking access roads on the Syrian side of the border. The Turkish army doesn't allow for humanitarian help onto the Syrian on its roughly 100 kilometers long border. The distance is only 18 kilometers from Turkey to the Robar refugee camp. It would be easy for humanitarian helpers to organize convoys bringing food, medicine, tents, blankets and clothing from Turkey to the Robar refugee camp. Since it does not allow for that, the Turkish government is to blame for the suffering of the refugees and the local population.

Afrin has taken in almost 400,000 people from Aleppo and other parts of Syria looking for help. The local population is supporting them as best as it can. Most refugees are Sunni Arabs from Aleppo and neighboring Arab regions. Afrin is part of the so-called Autonomous Region Rojava-North Syria, but it is cut off from the rest of the Kurdish areas in Northern Syria.

In Syria's North East, close to the Iraqi border, in the refugee camp al-Hawl, there are also supply bottlenecks that need to be overcome. Even before the current offensive against Islamists in Mosul people from Iraq fled to Northern Syria. The number of refugees fleeing Mosul is rising. Tens of thousands of Iraqi families are expected to enter Northern Syria. The Kurdish-led self-administration is willing to give them shelter in al-Hawl, but it needs help itself. According to Hozan Mahmo, a representative of the autonomous self-administration, basic conditions for the admission of many refugees must be established. He called on the international community to help. So far, the UNHRC is not willing to help the al Hawl camp. The UN agency is waiting for a permission by the Syrian government. We are calling for the provision of urgently needed help.

Society for Threatened Peoples is calling on the Human Rights Council to:

- Call on the Turkish government to open its borders for humanitarian help to Afrin, Kobani, Qamishli and Al-Haskeh
- Call on the Syrian government to allow international aid agencies such as the UNHCR to provide assistance in Afrin, Kobani, Qamishli and Al-Haskeh and other majority Kurdish areas of Northern Syria.