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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.

[11 February 2017]

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

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Challenges of Sand Storms and Drinking Water in South of Iran

More than 2 million annual deaths and billions of cases of diseases are attributed to pollution.¹ Environmental calamities are humanitarian tragedies which are widely ignored all over the world. The various dimensions of these problems are getting more complicated in developing countries such as Iran.

According to UN General Assembly resolution 64/292² the right to water and sanitation is recognized as essential to realization of all human rights. Also, the right to breathe clean air is a fundamental human right for all people. UNEP acknowledges the importance of the right to environment referring to the international human rights law including Stockholm Declaration, and the Rio Declaration, stressing on the link between human rights and environmental protection:

“The environment ...[is] a pre-requisite for the enjoyment of human rights (implying that human rights obligations of States should include the duty to ensure the level of environmental protection necessary to allow the full exercise of protected rights); Certain human rights, especially access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters... [are] essential to good environmental decision-making (implying that human rights must be implemented in order to ensure environmental protection)³.”

There are numerous international documents emphasizing on the link between enjoyment of human rights and existence of a healthy environment. Human Rights Council in its resolution 7/23 of March 2008⁴ and resolution 10/4 of March 2009⁵ specifically focused on human rights and climate change. Additionally, the General Assembly Resolution 45/121⁶ and ECOSOC Resolutions 1993/28⁷, 1994/15⁸, and 1995/27⁹ unanimously emphasized that environment can have serious implications for human rights.

Khuzestan, one of the southern Provinces of Islamic Republic of Iran, is seriously suffering from air and water pollution at the moment. Air pollution has been a serious daily challenge for the people of the region. The dust particles and dust storms has caused various forms of health problems in the region. Limitation of access to safe and clean drinking water in some areas has been affecting the human rights of the people for years. Despite continues attempts of the state and NGOs for solving the problem, on the ground, the people are still struggling with negative consequences of the long term pollution. The whole Khuzestan area including the cities of Ahvaz, Soosangerd and Dezful have been overtaken by dust storms for years now. Officials has announced the initiation of new researches on the acers of dust-rising land and new attempts to stop the dust rising from the areas. But they have not resulted in tangible changes of the situation.¹⁰

The condition of drinking water is no better. Horolazim and Shadegan wetlands are drying out and need restoration. By losing these water reservoirs, the situation will worsen. Karun, Karkheh and Jarrahi rivers, which are the most critical water resources of the province, contains high levels of toxic waste.

The industrial unites and the state should play higher role for improvement of the environmental situation in the Khuzestan province. The international human rights law holds the States and the private sector accountable for

¹ . <http://www.unep.org/delc/HumanRightsandTheEnvironment/tabid/54409/Default.aspx>

² . A/RES/64/292

³ . The previous reference.

⁴ . http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_7_23.pdf

⁵ . http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_10_4.pdf

⁶ . A/RES/45/121

⁷ . https://www.mpicc.de/files/pdf2/17_annex.pdf

⁸ . <http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1994/eres1994-15.htm>

⁹ . <http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1995/eres1995-27>

¹⁰ . <http://www.irna.ir/khuzestan/fa/News/82413696/>

protection of environment. Accordingly, responding to environmental issues is considered as an obligation of the States and the civil society organizations.

Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) acknowledges all government project funding and efforts including the initiative of hosting a regional meeting on combating sand and dust storms leading to the UN resolution A/71/463.

However, being concerned about the situation and living conditions of people in the south of Iran the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) calls on the government and the private sector in the region:

To monitor the full implementation of new water refineries in the province including in the main cities of Ahwaz, Abadan, and Dezful.

To support and ensure the full implementation of the projects that revitalize Horolazim and Shadegan wetlands.

To continue planting trees on dust rising lands of Iran-Iraq borders, in order to prevent occurrences of dust storms. To realize this aim, officials can use the potential capacity of millions of Arbaeen and Ashoora pilgrims, who travel from Iran to Iraq to perform religious ceremonies, as it was done in Nov. 2016 in a smaller scale¹¹.

To Carefully monitor and study the construction of any new dams on the rivers that are sources of water for Karun and Karkheh, avoiding creation of any reduction in the amount of water the two main rivers are receiving.

ODVV also calls on the local NGOs to fully engage with local authorities to find short term solutions to improve people's access to safe drinking water while the long term water projects are being implemented.

ODVV encourages the NGOs to join the local authorities and run awareness raising campaigns on adequate water consumption and methods of dealing with sand storms and desertification.

¹¹ . <http://www.yjc.ir/fa/news/5856829/%D8%A9%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AE%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%AC%D9%81>