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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 Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development, 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.

[12 May 2017]

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

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The rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association

The Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development welcome this opportunity to address the Human Rights Council and to reaffirm its respect for the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

These rights are among the most important human rights we enjoy. Simply put, they preserve peoples' capability to assembly, debate and work for a common goal: their common good. These very rights are a vehicle for the performance of many civil, political and social rights, which allow people to express their public opinions, participate in artistic and religious activities, join trade unions, present their political points of view, and represent political leaders they hold accountable when exercising the right to vote.

Nowadays the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly are enshrined in international law as fundamental freedoms. In addition, their philosophical concepts are protected under Article 20(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Human Rights Council has also emphasized its commitment to promote and protect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly by embracing resolutions 21/16 and 24/5, in which they reiterated the importance of these rights, as well as the significance of civil society to promote good governance through transparency and accountability – a crucial factor for building a sustainable democracy.

Notwithstanding the Council's commitments to ensure the protection of this fundamental right, the Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development is deeply concerned with the plethora of violations that some states are still exercising around the world. State institutions that were meant to provide an open space for individuals to freely express themselves are continually violating this fundamental right. In many states security forces, for instance, are still committing atrocious human rights violations by using excessive force to disperse individuals protesting peacefully, by arresting journalists and government opponents, activists and NGOs workers. The excessive use of violence towards individuals exercising their rights is of a grave concern to the international community.

While most country's constitutions provide for freedom of assembly and association, the laws imposed heavy restrictions on the right to assembly peacefully. Public demonstration, for instance, some were limited to restrict it from few hours to a one-day duration.

In addition to that, the ruling parties usually continually impeding gathering activities among civilians from happening to hamper the backdrop of national elections. Some government forces arrest demonstrators by alleging that they are participating in protests the government.

The Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development is concerned at the ongoing political violence some nations are experiencing, including attacks by security forces. The organization condemns indiscriminate attacks at civilians, and criticizes their repression for using lawful and peaceful means of protest,

Also, many social media activists were charged and imprisoned for expressing their opinions on their accounts, under the excuse of incitement and neglecting their right to freedom of expression or freedom of opinion.

Number of charitable organizations which targeting poor and needy families were also closed and prevented from running its projects and achieving its goals. This is an infringement to the international human rights laws and humanitarian law.

There are many examples which demonstrate that changes are urgently needed, and action from the international community is constantly demanded. People have the right to freedom of association and to assemble peacefully to enjoy their civil liberty and to defend common interests. States on the other hand have the responsibility to ensure that people can express their points of view freely, without facing any kind of threats and violence. Freedom, therefore, must be the rule not the exception.