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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by the Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik, 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.

[15 May 2017]

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

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Child early marriages and child mothers in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a signatory to the Convention on the Right of the Child and has ratified it in July 1994. Nevertheless, according to article 1041 of the Civil law in the Islamic Republic of Iran there is no minimum age for marriage. The girl child with the consent of the legal guardian and the sanction by court could be married off, at any age. There is no limitation on the age difference of the girl child bride and the groom. The same situation exists for boys. The marriage of girls above 13 and boys above 15 doesn't need the court permission. However, girls and women above 13 need the permission of the legal male guardian to marry for the first time and that applies to any age.

Over 34% of all marriages registered officially in 1394 (2015-2016) are related to the underage brides.¹ There is no statistics on unofficial under-age girl marriages but this phenomenon exists. On 11th Dec. 2016, a member of judiciary commission of the Islamic Parliament spoke of 12000 to 13000 such not registered marriages of under 13-14 year old girls². Although some authorities including the minister for health, Mr Seyed-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi and the Vice President for Women and family affairs Ms. Shahindokht Molaverdi have already emphasized that marriage of girls below 13 and even under 10 are not acceptable and not legal, nevertheless, no serious steps have been taken to prevent the marriage of under 13 year old girls, let alone those between 13-18³.

The Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society has carried out a research⁴ on the proportion of child marriage among various ethnic groups in 17 provinces of Iran and in slogans of big cities: Fars, 15%, Turks, 15%, Mazanians, 12%, Tajiks, 10%, Baluchs, 8.5%, Pashtuns, 8%, Arabs, 8%, Hazarehs, 4.7%, Kurds, 4.5%, Laks, 4.5%, Lors, 3.8%, Sistanis 2.5%, Uzbeks, 2.5%, Gilaks, 0.5%, other ethnic groups 0.5%.

The same research shows that child marriage among boys is 35% and girls 65%. Those who are less literate have a bigger percentage of child marriage in their category. Among the research, 37.5% of these children were illiterate, 37.5% under secondary schooling, 22% high school or less and only 3% had higher education. Among the married children, 40% were unsatisfied at all, 11% were very little satisfied, 12% were little unsatisfied, 13% were partly satisfied, 17% were satisfied and 7% were very much satisfied of their age of marriage.

On history of domestic violence against these groups, 47% of these girls had history of bruises, 21% physical lesions, 53% broken bones and 3% experienced permanent damages. The age difference between spouses: 5%, 15-40 years, 10%, 10-15 years and 85% less than 10 years.

According to another research⁵ carried out by Kameel Ahmady in 7 provinces, 27% of the victims of child marriage are at school at the time of marriage; 45% had left school to help with housework and child care. Most respondents had primary school education and only 10% had finished high school. In 57.1%, the girl was at school during marriage process. In 74.1% and during marriage negotiations, they had been promised to continue their education. This had never happened.

¹Table-1 <http://www.iranhrc.org/index.php?p=1916> (full report with tables and charts)

² <http://www.majlesnews.ir/fa/text/27534/%DB%B1%DB%B2-%D8%AA%D8%A7-%DB%B1%DB%B3-%D9%87%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%BA%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86>

³ Table-2 <http://www.iranhrc.org/index.php?p=1916>

⁴ <http://www.isna.ir/news/95092112286>

⁵ <http://www.ana.ir/news/148493>

Of the married girls, 21% said they were forced to have sexual relations with their spouses. Few had the ability to raise their objection to the forced sexual relations as they believed it was part of their marriage duties. Of these girls, 42.9% were uncomfortable during intercourse; 28.6% hated it and 28.6% felt anger about it.

In areas, where child marriage is practiced, decisions were often taken by the parents but 76.2% said they were informed of the decision, while 23% said they had no knowledge of who they were married to; and 42.9% were not willing to get married.

In all, 60% of the respondents believed child marriage must be stopped, while 32.5% believed it depends on the body growth of the child and personal beliefs. However, none of the respondents had any knowledge of the legal age of marriage and believed legal age is 18 for girls. Most of them said that they believe 15 is too early for girls to marry.

Observations in rural areas of Gilak-Abad in eastern Azarbaijan showed that girls are engaged at the early age of 1-2 and there were no girl above the age of 5 who was not engaged to someone. In some cases the female is being engaged while still in her mother's womb. In the interviews, the locals spoke of their beliefs and traditions to carry out such practice.

Reason for early child marriage are often tradition, religion, family honour and cultural. The patriarchal system in the families contributes to the phenomenon of early child marriage. Other factors range from poverty, addiction, migration and similar factors among the population.

Recommendation:

- Changing the law regarding the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys, raising it to 18,
- Forbidding the courts to give permission to parents of guardian to marry children at young age.
- Public discussions on deprivation of childhood regarding early child marriage,
- Public discussions on both psychological and physical health consequences for girl brides.

Child mothers

The statistics of National Organization for Civil Registration of underage mothers is divided to two age ranges, i.e. under 15 and 15-19. Around 7% of all birth certificates issued in the country, belong to underage mothers⁶. There is no published official statistics on infant mortalities regarding the mother's age.

The statistics on the mortality of mothers under 18 years of age due to birth complications are not officially published. However, statistics are around 1%, according to the chairman of the mother-infant health office of the health ministry (2014-2015).

Imam Ali's research showed of the married girls, 80% had no history of repeated miscarriages and 20% had the history of miscarriage. About 56% used some form of contraceptive and 44% did not use any contraceptive method. Among the group in research, 11% were married before puberty, 74% after and 15% during puberty.

Ahmady's research indicated that 97% of the girls had at least one pregnancy and were taken care by the mother and members of family, 45% had no complication during pregnancy, while 27% had painful labour and extreme bleeding. One of the respondents said she had a child before the age of 15 and 88% were in risk of tears and infection during childbirth. The respondents had no knowledge of child mothers and the risks it could carry. While they were stitched up after birth, they were unaware of the consequences.

The research showed that in Sistan and Baluchistan province the ratio of child marriage to total number of marriages had never been below 40%. Mortality and complications during and after birth are common. 12% of women who die during childbirth are from Sistan and Baluchistan although the birth rate of this province is 5.64% of the country. A doctor in Iran reminisced that "in February 2017 a mother was referred to him for the undergrowth of her baby. At 13,

⁶ Table-3 <http://www.iranhrc.org/index.php?p=1916>

with the bone structure of a child and 40 kilos weight, she was carrying her baby to my surgery for diagnosis and treatment. I was not sure if she understood my instructions. She had been married at 12 to a man who looked 19/20. Their 2 months old infant was not growing normally.”

Recommendations:

- Restart of family planning and birth prevention courses for underage child brides and grooms,
 - Public discussion on the risks and injuries of giving birth to a child for child mothers,
 - Public discussion on the risks for infants when the mothers are still growing children.
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