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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 Society for Protection of Street & Working Children, 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 August 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Situation of Afghan Street Children in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Following the Taliban take over in Afghanistan, thousands of illegal Afghan migrants have been fleeing into the Islamic Republic of Iran on a daily basis. Children have been among the people who have been forced to leave their country following the political unrest. The displaced or refugee children move into neighboring countries in search for a better life, and this has been the case for many unaccompanied Afghan children who came to the Islamic Republic of Iran for work and earn a living for their families.

This is while one of the severe challenges of the Islamic Republic of Iran is dealing with forced displacement of Afghan children who enter the country informally through eastern borders. Many of these children are expected by their families to join child labor to help their families. They wander in the streets of large cities and are exposed to various forms of social harms. Therefore, multiple actors, especially Iranian NGOs are trying to take serious steps to support the children by improving their health and living standard.

To guarantee the access of all Afghan children to education, there was a Supreme Leader's order in April 2015 on all schools to enroll Afghan children regardless of their legal status, underlining that no Afghan child, including undocumented or illegal refugees should be left behind without education. Following the Order, the number of refugee children who would enroll in Iranian public schools increased annually, and in 2018 the number was seven times higher than the previous year.

Despite all attempts to send Afghan children to school, currently, they form the majority of street children in the Islamic Republic of Iran while various sectors of the country including the Society for Protection of Street & Working Children (SPWSC) which has been helping vulnerable children for years are now doing their best to empower these children.

SPWSC has been active in supporting vulnerable children in the Islamic Republic of Iran for the past 20 years. The organization is entirely independent of the government, totally drawing on the generosity of its donors and capacity of its volunteer members. It has been making untiring efforts to improve the situation of marginalized children and offer them informal teachings, educational and hygiene packs and free medical services as well as literacy and life skills training, aiming at the improvement of their physical and mental health. Besides, the organization provides children with occupational training, facilitating the process of bringing them out of the margins of society and integrating them into the normal workforce.

Unfortunately, inside the Islamic Republic of Iran, efforts of NGOs are hampered by the challenges created by the Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCMs) or economic sanctions. The comprehensive UCMs have multiple adverse effects on the activities of all civil society members and shrink all the financial resources available to them and disrupt the functioning of the NGOs, with Afghan street children paying the highest price.

In addition, the sanctions have escalated the cost of medicine and medical care which limits the access of the children to healthcare. As an example, we would like to refer to the case of a dentist who would offer free treatment to street children under the support of SPWSC. The dentist announced that the price of material and equipment required for treatments have considerably increased, and the chances of offering free treatments to the children are reducing.

Recommendations

Being over-concerned with the high-risk situation of Afghan street children in the Islamic Republic of Iran, multiplied by UCMs, SPWSC calls on the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan to fortify its efforts to address their situation of the children in HRC reports.

The annual education costs for Afghan children studying in the Islamic Republic of Iran is around 150 million US dollars, a tiny portion of which is provided by international organizations. Therefore, we call on the international community for further support to improve the situation of these refugees and protect them against social harms.