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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 Elizka Relief Foundation, 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.

[29 May 2023]

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

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Importance of Registering Victims in Promoting Human Rights

First: Registering Victims in Conflict and Post-Conflict Areas

Registering victims in conflict and post-conflict areas helps finding out the truth, providing compensation, and do justice to the families of the victims when the situation stabilizes in these countries. The United Nations agencies and working groups in member states in conflict areas and in recovery stages provide data regarding the civilian victims, but mostly this data is not disaggregated according to sex, age, or alleged perpetrators and is limited to the statistical aspect only (1). In conflict situations, specifically, it is difficult for parties that have systems to monitor these deaths, such as local civil society organizations and international organizations, to identify the people who are victims due to the obstruction of fieldwork and the lack of regular monitoring by armed groups outside the state, and the non-availability of victim records to independent authorities to be reviewed for fear of conviction or naming the perpetrators (2). The lack of regular monitoring and comprehensiveness of monitoring based on disaggregated data leads to large numbers of missing persons, some of whom may have already been killed or subjected to other practices such as enforced disappearance(3).

In Yemen, for example, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society, thousands of people are still missing, and there are limited efforts to trace these people to find out their fate(4). In the Syrian Arab Republic, despite the regular recording of the number of victims and human losses in the Syrian Arab Republic, there are still about 130000 people are among the missing, while Elizka Relief Foundation believes that the actual numbers may exceed that number due to the lack of reporting and the limited awareness of some families who have lost loved ones by the mechanisms of knowing the truth(5).

There is also a close link between the victims and the increase in human losses and armed conflicts in Africa. For example, more than 35 armed conflicts and areas of tension in Africa are still continuing. Armed conflicts lead to an increase in the number of missing persons, whether those who are killed and whose remains are not found, or those who are driven by conflicts to migrate and may die at sea or on the borders. Children are among the most vulnerable groups to loss during armed conflicts. For example, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, there are 25,000 minors missing in Africa, which constitutes 40% of the total missing persons in Africa. Therefore, the comprehensive registration of victims according to disaggregated data may reduce the number of missing persons and lead to knowing the truth and determining the fate of thousands of those who were missed during conflicts. In some cases, clear statistics regarding casualties and human losses may be used by United Nations bodies in addressing these parties, to stop the excessive force used by some countries or groups in the context of armed conflicts.

Projects and Measures to Record Casualties and Human Losses

As part of Elizka Relief Foundation preparation of this intervention, it has reviewed a number of good projects in documenting and recording victims and human losses. Supporting these projects and allowing much freedom to practice their work would help in identifying more victims.

One such project, for example, is Nigeria Watch, a media monitoring project that records all victims reported in dozens of national daily newspapers in Nigeria - whether as a result of armed conflict, road traffic accidents or domestic violence(6). The Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation, an independent foundation that has discovered the remains of more than 7,000 victims, helped identify missing family members, and provided crucial testimonies in trials in Guatemala and Spain. The foundation uses genetics to match human remains with personal information provided by family members, so that In the event of matching, the bodies will be returned to them for burial. Thanks to this foundation, compensation has been provided to the families of the victims in Guatemala.

In a related context, Airwars organization was established in 2014, to track the damage and losses caused to civilians due to the military actions in countries of armed conflict and countries in post-conflict stages such as Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, Libya and Somalia. The organization uses a range of different sources, focusing on local media and social media reports (7).

In Africa, also there is the Crisis Tracker project, a geospatial database that tracks armed group activity and armed conflict-related incidents in remote areas of some provinces in the Central African Republic and the Congo (8). Book projects can also be a factor in recording victims and human losses, among the specific examples is the book "LOST LIVES", which is a clear example of the importance of recording victims in promoting human rights, as the book documents chronologically the circumstances of each violent death resulting from the conflicts occurred in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, commemorating and naming each. (9)

The Project's aim is to overcome data shortages, enhance the response of humanitarian and protection actors, and raise public awareness about the impact of armed conflict on vulnerable civilian populations. However, some of these projects still lack identification of individuals who die, disaggregating data according to factors such as sex, age, and name, and the alleged perpetrators.

The Sustainable Development Goal 16

Victim registration influences the assessment of the first target of SDG 16 which states "significantly reduce all forms of violence and related mortality rates everywhere." This registration sets an indicator to measure this violence represented in the number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 people, according to age group and gender." (10) Violence and unjustified and extrajudicial killings, especially in conflicts, marginalize this target of Goal 16, and makes it impossible to achieve it. Also, not identifying the victims who may die due to lack of food or water in conflicts affects the realization of this target.

Although the Office of the High Commissioner put the registration of victims in conflict areas as a priority, as was the case in the Syrian Arab Republic for example, when the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was able to report civilian deaths directly resulting from the 10 years of conflict, including the total number of evidence-based civilian deaths, undocumented death estimates, however, still exclude victims from deaths due to causes other than armed violence or intentional homicide. For example, the records of the victims do not record the deaths of those who died due to hunger or food insecurity or after contracting diseases caused by polluted water.

In addition, killings resulting from medical negligence are not classified as intentional homicide. In any case, the decline in intentional homicide levels is not very likely in the short term. According to the Sustainable Development Report 2022 (11), by 2030, the global rate of homicide is likely to decrease by 19% from the 2015 level, to reach about 4.8 per 100,000 people, which is a slight decrease compared to the target in the Sustainable Development Goals. For a faster rate of homicide reduction, additional measures should be put in place in public policies aimed at preventing gender-based homicides in home.

Recommendations

• Calling for independent monitoring systems based on disaggregated data to record victims and human losses.

• Inclusion of human losses for killings resulting from medical negligence and all deaths caused by lack of food or water or killings based on gender.

• Establishing monitoring systems to track missing persons in areas of armed conflict and areas of tension to identify victims and persons who may still be alive.

• Providing resources and possible support for projects based on registering victims and removing all obstacles that may limit their work.

- Creating a variety of guides to inform all stakeholders of the real benefits of victim registration.

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(1) Guidance on Casualty Recording, https://bit.ly/3q3yFm8

(2)Behind the data: Recording civilian casualties in Syria, https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/05/behind-data-recording-civilian-casualties-syria

(3)Looking for answers: accounting for the separated, missing and dead in international armed conflicts, https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2022/04/11/separated-missing-dead-international-armed-conflicts/

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(4)Detainees in Yemen: Parties to the Conflict to Uphold Their Obligations under, https://bit.ly/432DKdm

(5) More than 130,000 Missing from the Syrian Conflict With Numbers Still on the Rise, https://bit.ly/45iojz4

(6) Practitioner conformance with the Standards for Casualty Recording, page 6, https://bit.ly/3MnF435

(7) see, https://airwars.org/

(8) see, https://crisistracker.org

(9) Remembering the victims of the Troubles, https://everycasualty.org/remembering-the-victims-of-the-troubles

(10) The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals, goal 16.1.1, https://sdg.humanrights.dk/en/goals-and-targets?page=4

(11) The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf