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**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance: follow-up to and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Written statement* submitted by Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, 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.

[27 May 2023]

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



Preventing the Members of the Druze Community in Israel Including Family Members and Relatives from Conducting Religious Visits to Holy Places to Perform Religious Duties in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon and from Communicating with their Families

Facts and Nature of the Alleged Violation and Domestic Remedies

1. The vast majority of the Druze community live in the Middle East in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Israel and Jordan, and constitute a religious minority in the countries in which they live. The members of the Druze sect are distributed among these countries, and they are known for maintaining good neighborliness with their neighbors from the other sects. One of the basic principles of the members of the Druze community is the principle of preserving the brotherhood. Hence, the relations between the members of the Druze community have developed in the countries in which they live, so that it has become one of the religious obligations and social customs to organize annual visits to the shrines of God's prophets and guardians and to establish religious duties in them.

2. It is known to the members of the Druze community that for more than a hundred years, the Sheikhs (the clergymen) and youth of the community have met in four important religious visits:

- (A) Visiting the shrine of the Prophet Shuaib "peace be upon him" in Hittin (in Israel).
- (B) Visiting the shrine of the Prophet Habeel "peace be upon him" near Damascus (in the Syrian Arab Republic).
- (C) Visiting the shrine of the Prophet Ayoub "peace be upon him" in the Chouf mountains near Niha (in Lebanon).
- (D) A visit to the Bayada retreats near Hasbaya (in Lebanon), which is the spiritual reference for all the Druze in the world.

The clergymen of the Druze community from all over the world would gather on these occasions to carry out religious duties, perform prayers, and research problems that threaten the community's entity.

3. Therefore, for the members of the Druze sect, these visits have a great religious value in addition to being an opportunity for communication between the members of the Druze sect, especially since it connects many family members of the Druze sect that live in the different countries that have social and family relations. There are entire families who live in different countries far from each other, and religious visits are a good opportunity to hold family meetings between members of the same family.

4. Mutual visits between members of the Druze community were a normal and acceptable thing before the establishment of Israel, and the Druze of the State of Palestine used to make annual visits in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon in a normal manner and without any obstacles. But after the establishment of Israel, the situation changed, and visits were cut off for a long period of time.

5. In the recent period, movements began to be organized by social and religious groups and personalities in order to restore communication between the members of the Druze community in Israel and the members of the Druze community in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. Among these movements emerged the Druze Liaison Committee Arabs 48 (hereinafter: "The Druze Liaison Committee") headed by Sheikh Ali Moadi, who led a march of evacuees and youth who are jealous of the Druze community from all the Druze villages in the Galilee and Carmel in order to communicate between the people of The Druze community in the world and in order to revive mutual religious visits and participate in religious rites in the annual holy visits, which are religious duties for the members of the Druze community.

6. The Druze Liaison Committee organized religious visits to the Syrian Arab Republic on important religious occasions in which dozens of Sheikhs of the Druze community in Israel participated, and these visits were mainly religious. The Sheikhs were received in a popular and religious reception in the Syrian Arab Republic, highlighting the importance of maintaining communication between the members of the Druze sect in the world, as the members of the Druze sect, in addition to the religious relationship, have family ties of kinship, both near and far. Many members of the Druze community moved to live in different countries from an old or recent time. There are kinship ties that amount to brothers or cousins who each live in another country, and the international and political situation has prevented them for a long time from meeting their families and relatives.

7. The visits made by the Druze Liaison Committee have mainly religious and social goals. These visits have existed for a long time, as there were reciprocal visits between the members of the Druze community before the establishment of Israel. After the establishment of Israel, the situation changed and the members of the Druze community were denied the right to exercise this right.

8. It is worth mentioning that members of other sects such as the Islamic sect, the Christian sect, the Baha'i sect, and even the Jews and others have not been forbidden and prevented by Israel from religious visits to perform religious rites in the countries of the region. On the contrary, it facilitates the procedures for them and grants them the necessary permits and they number in the thousands, and this is their right. The members of the Islamic sect perform Hajj and Umrah to Saudi Arabia via Jordan. The same applies to members of the Christian community who pay religious visits to Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic through the Naqoura crossing. The same applies to members of the Baha'i community who pay religious visits to Islamic Republic of Iran. With the exception of the Druze community, Israel has not prevented any of the members of other sects from performing religious duties and visits in Arab countries or other countries in the region, despite the absence of diplomatic relations between Israel and any of these countries.

9. But with regard to the Druze community, Israel decided to ban the visits of the Sheikhs of the Druze community in Israel to the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, and worked to prevent such visits by various means and methods, and found various alleged reasons to justify this decision, and each time it used another pretext.

10. In 2005, the Druze Liaison Committee and its Chairman, Sheikh Ali Moadi, submitted a petition to the High Court of Justice in Israel in order to obtain a judicial decision obligating the government of Israel to give the necessary permits to exercise the right to communicate. The matter was discussed before the Supreme Court, but the court rejected the petition and rejected the case.

11. What the Israeli government is doing is a violation of the basic human rights of the Druze community. International Human Rights law guarantee the right of worship and the establishment of religious rites, as well as the right of communication between family and relatives.

Legal and Human Rights Violations

12. What Israel is doing is a violation of the rights of the Druze community as a community and its children as individuals, and it contradicts the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistics Minorities adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/135 of December 18, 1992 (with regard to The following: "the United Nations Declaration ").

13. In Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration, Clause 1 states that "States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of the minorities within their respective territories, and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity."

14. In Article 2 of the United Nations Declaration, Clause 3 states: "Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation."

15. Also in Article 2 of the United Nations Declaration, Clause 5 states: "Persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain, without any discrimination, free and peaceful contacts with other members of their group and with persons belonging to other minorities, as well as contacts across frontiers with citizens of other States to whom they are related by national or ethnic, religious or linguistic links".

16. Accordingly, what the Israeli government is doing harms the rights of the Druze community and its members, depriving them of their right to communicate with members of their community in neighboring countries, and preventing them from practicing their religious rites unlawfully.

17. Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture and the Druze Liaison Committee addresses the Human Rights Council I and submits this statement asking to take all measures to lift the ban against all members of the Druze community living in Israel from making religious visits to the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon and allow meetings between relatives of the same families in these countries.

Druze Liaison Committee, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.