



General Assembly

Distr.: General
20 February 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-fifth session

26 February–5 April 2024

Agenda item 2

**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 Réseau Unité pour le Développement de Mauritanie, 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.

[25 January 2024]

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



Trafficking Children in Tindouf Refugee Camps by Non-State Armed Groups

Urgent Concerns: Human Trafficking and Exploitation in the Tindouf Refugee Camps, Algeria

We write to the Council today to express deep concern over the alarming issue of human trafficking and exploitation in the Tindouf refugee camps, located in Algeria. These camps have been home to Sahrawi refugees since the 1970s, following the Sahara conflict. Despite the efforts of various stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, and local communities, the situation in the Tindouf refugee camps remains dire, particularly for the most vulnerable population, including women and children. trafficking in the Tindouf refugee camps primarily involves forced labor and sexual exploitation. Disturbing reports suggest that children are particularly vulnerable, with instances of trafficking for military recruitment or being taken to other countries under the guise of educational programs, only to end up being exploited. Such acts of exploitation and abuse are a grave violation of human rights and demand immediate attention and action.

Efforts to combat trafficking in the Tindouf refugee camps are hindered by several factors. The remote location of the camps, limited governance, and lack of law enforcement resources make it difficult to monitor and control trafficking activities effectively. Additionally, the political sensitivity surrounding the status of Tindouf complicates international intervention. It is crucial for the international community to recognize the urgency of this issue and collaborate to address the root causes and consequences of human trafficking in the Tindouf refugee camps.

The refugees in the Tindouf refugee camps, especially women and children, face heightened risks due to their vulnerable status, lack of economic opportunities, and limited access to education and other basic services. It is disheartening to witness the cycle of exploitation and abuse perpetuated against these individuals who have already endured immense suffering as refugees. Urgent action is required to protect their rights, ensure their safety, and provide them with the necessary support and opportunities for a dignified and secure future.

Furthermore, recent incidents have shed light on the severe financial crisis faced by the "Polisario front " and the concerning tactics they employ to extort funds. One such incident involved the extortion of a Spanish family, demanding a ransom for the return of their adopted Sahrawi daughter. The family refused to succumb to the extortion, and the girl's biological family in the Tindouf refugee camps tore up her travel documents to prevent her from returning to Spain.

This distressing incident highlights the exploitation of minors and children in the Tindouf refugee camps, ranging from forcing them into armed activities to using them for financial extortion. It is essential to recognize that despite Morocco's strict laws on adoption, the girl F. remains a daughter of Morocco, and her well-being and rights must be protected. The Algerian authorities, instead of ensuring justice and facilitating her return to Spain, have mobilized efforts to return her to the Tindouf refugee camps,

In light of these alarming developments, we call upon the United Nations Human Rights Council and its esteemed members to take immediate action to address the human trafficking and exploitation in the Tindouf refugee camps. We urge the following measures to be considered:

1. Increased international monitoring: Strengthen efforts to monitor and control trafficking activities in the Tindouf refugee camps through enhanced international cooperation and support. This includes increased presence of human rights organizations, independent observers, and UN agencies to ensure the safety and protection of the refugees, especially women and children.

2. Improved governance and law enforcement: Encourage the Algerian government to address the governance challenges and provide necessary resources for effective law enforcement in the Tindouf refugee camps. This involves training and equipping local security forces and establishing channels for reporting and investigating cases of human trafficking.
3. Access to education and economic opportunities: Enhance access to quality education and vocational training programs within the Tindouf refugee camps to empower refugees, particularly women and children, and provide them with viable alternatives to exploitation. Economic development initiatives should be implemented to create sustainable livelihoods, reducing the vulnerability of the refugee population to trafficking.
4. Collaboration and support: Foster international cooperation between governments, NGOs, and local communities to combat human trafficking in the Tindouf refugee camps. This includes sharing best practices, resources, and expertise to develop comprehensive strategies and interventions that address the root causes of trafficking and promote the protection of human rights.

In conclusion, urgent action is needed to address the distressing issue of human trafficking and exploitation in the Tindouf refugee camps. The rights and well-being of the refugees, especially women and children, must be safeguarded, and their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities must be prioritized. I implore the United Nations Human Rights Council to take immediate action and raise awareness about this critical issue, mobilize resources, and work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to protect the rights and dignity of the refugees in the Tindouf refugee camps.

The international community has a moral obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals, particularly those who are most vulnerable. By addressing the root causes of human trafficking and exploitation in the Tindouf refugee camps, we can contribute to a more just and equitable world.

We look forward to Council's prompt action and commitment to the protection of human rights in the Tindouf refugee camps.
