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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 Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, 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.

[03 June 2019]

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

Effects of Unilateral United States' Sanctions on Afghan Refugees in Iran:

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health

The security, political and economic developments in Afghanistan, particularly over the last four decades, has caused the displacement of millions of Afghans into other countries, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran). Lack of substantial improvement of the security, political and economic conditions of Afghanistan and also the lack of necessary infrastructures has made the repatriation of these individuals into the country impossible, and these individuals either willingly or unwillingly continue living in Iran. Thus, after decades, there are still around one million Afghan refugees and about 1.5 million non-refugee Afghans living in Iran.

The situation has gone on for a long time, on the one hand it puts a lot of pressure on Iran and on the other hand United States unilateral sanctions, has raised the inflation rate and increased the economic pressures on Afghan refugees and migrants as one of the most vulnerable groups in Iran. International organizations' statistics show that in spite of lack of necessary infrastructures in Afghanistan, those groups of refugees and migrants who due to financial difficulties and the tight Turkish-Iranian border control are not able to leave the country and head to Europe, are forced to return to Afghanistan. Since their return is forced and there are no necessary basis for their integration into Afghanistan, the possibility of them flooding back into Iran cannot be ruled out.

Furthermore, since Afghan refugees in Iran do not receive direct financial assistance (such as the Iranian government's targeted subsidies) the expansion of US sanctions has directly threatened their livelihoods, and the continuation of the economic crisis created by these sanctions, has forced the refugee community to seek bitter solutions to resolve their economic problems. These solutions include denying children education and denying the wish for a better living for the third generation of refugees in Iran, placing the third generation migrants into the working class, refusing to take medical treatments, and reduction in purchasing of basic goods such as food and clothes. In fact the economic problems caused by sanctions result in a vast number of Afghan refugees to be denied of their basic rights such as right to education, health and even enough food. The number of these vulnerable individuals increases on a daily basis.

Although with the assistance of various international organizations such as the UNHCR, to an extent some of the problems, especially problems related to the most vulnerable are resolved, but the assistances does not cover all refugees nor in all fields. For example only 350,000 Afghan refugee children are able to enjoy state-run education system in the country, even though, in some regions schools have been forced to hold classes in two shifts. UNHCR has built few schools to help the refugees with education, however, as it was stated earlier, the number of schools is much lower than needed.

Also, various studies show that the majority of Afghan refugees and migrants in the country are willing to tolerate any difficulties to get to Europe. The low number of acceptance of Afghan refugees from Iran by Europe, the economic pressures in Iran and lack of opportunity for their repatriation for those refugees that are in Iran, will result in their being forced into illegal migration, which will most certainly cause dangers for them and their families.

While condemning unilateral sanctions, particularly those that directly and indirectly affect health and medical treatment, education and livelihood of civilians, Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) makes the following recommendations:

- While appreciating the aid provided by the UN, international organizations and also donor countries (the EU, Japan, Norway, Belgium, France and Germany) in support of Afghan refugees and migrants in Iran, we believe that it is necessary that these donors increase their support for the Afghan refugee and migrant community in Iran particularly in the field of health and medical treatment, education and livelihood. Lack of provision of support for Afghans in Iran can violate their basic rights, to cause a rise in criminal activities, drug trafficking and human trafficking to other countries.

- We call upon refugee host governments to increase their acceptance of Afghan refugees, particularly the most vulnerable groups in Iran.

- We call on the international community to support reconstruction in Afghanistan to create a better basis for the repatriation of refugees to their country as a lasting solution.
