



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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15 June–3 July 2020

Agenda item 3

**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.

[27 May 2020]

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

GE.20-08318(E)



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## **Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child (theme: “Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment”)**

### **Yemen and the Destructive Impact of War on the Environment and Children’s Health**

Five years have passed since the launch of the Saudi-led coalition attack and the conditions of the people of Yemen has worsened due to daily aggression and airstrikes launched by the aggressors, alongside the multilateral sanctions imposed against the country.

Every day, the people of the country are faced with new problems. Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East and the fifth poorest in the world. The country has been inflicted with severe damages from this man-made crisis, which is one of the most catastrophic crises in the world. But Yemeni children are the main victims of this conflict. In addition, destruction of the environment and the country’s infrastructures are among the serious concerns of environmental experts at the international level.

#### **Manmade Destruction of the Environment and Infrastructures**

In view of the destruction of the environment in Yemen by the Saudi-led coalition forces as a result of extensive attacks against the country and imposed blockade, Article 55 of The Hague Convention IV (1907) (Regulations respecting the laws and customs of war on land) states: “The occupying State shall be regarded only as administrator and usufructuary of public buildings, real estate, forests, and agricultural estates belonging to the hostile State, and situated in the occupied country. It must safeguard the capital of these properties, and administer them in accordance with the rules of usufruct.” However, the Saudi-led Coalition has been destroying a huge proportion of the already impoverished Yemen infrastructures.

Between March 2015 and October 2019, the Saudi-led coalition launched at least 12,000 airstrikes in Yemen, which aside from farms, 800 local food markets were attacked and approximately 500 airstrikes were launched against silos and other food warehouses.

According to a field study, conducted by the Yemeni Agriculture Ministry, in the period between March 2015 to March 2019, the Saudi-led coalition attacks completely destroyed 270 agricultural buildings and equipment, 43 agricultural associations, 9017 traditional water irrigation channels, at least 1834 watering pumps, 10170 modern irrigation networks, 33 solar powered irrigation units, 54 agricultural markets and 45 export centres.

The fisheries of the country suffered a lot of damages over these years. At the end of May 2019 fishing ports were attacked by Saudi-led coalition force and at least 220 fishing boats were destroyed and 40000 fishermen have lost their only source of income.<sup>1</sup>

The destruction of historic sites and buildings is another environmental problem for any country as a result of war. As a result of the Saudi-led coalition forces aggression to-date 465 archeological sites and tourist attractions destroyed leading to thousands of job losses which provided livelihood for thousands of Yemeni families.<sup>2</sup>

Yemen conflict has caused a notable reduction in species diversity, and habitats caught in the conflict have left no chance of life for animals. Now with regards to protected areas the situation is even direr.

Destruction of all these infrastructures is added to the effects of airstrikes, pollutants, floating waste in the waters of the Red Sea, contamination of drinking water, destruction of hospitals and medical centres, shortages of aid, drugs and food have caused the pollution and destruction of a vast portion of the country’s environment, also this has caused the outbreak

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<sup>1</sup> [https://parstoday.com/en/radio/west\\_asia-1212111-saudi\\_attacks\\_on\\_farmers\\_pushing\\_yemen\\_into\\_famine](https://parstoday.com/en/radio/west_asia-1212111-saudi_attacks_on_farmers_pushing_yemen_into_famine).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200402-yemens-houthis-saudi-coalition-destroyed-475-archaeological-sites/>.

of various diseases such as cholera, diarrhea, cancer, dengue fever, tuberculosis, respiratory failure among the people, women and children in particular.

### **Yemeni Children and Diseases**

According to a UNICEF report more than 5 million Yemeni children are in increased risk of contracting cholera and acute diarrhea in the middle of the outbreak of COVID-19 virus and the arrival of the monsoon season. From January 2020, more than 110 thousand possible cases of cholera have been registered, one fourth of which are children under five.

Children in Yemen are faced with thousands of threats for their survival and in view of the spread of infectious diseases which currently exist in Yemen, with the outbreak of COVID-19, conditions for children and their families has become more critical.<sup>3</sup> Every ten minutes a child dies in Yemen from treatable diseases caused by poor environmental infrastructure and hygiene services.<sup>4</sup>

### **Children and the Destruction of Education Centers**

In a report UNICEF states that more than 2 million children in Yemen are deprived of education. This is while around 46 percent of girls and 54 percent of girls have registered in schools and in 2015 girls in two middle school levels left school because of security problems and shortage of female teachers and lack of suitable education facilities.<sup>5</sup> Also, the right to education of another over 3 million children in this country is under threat in view of the ongoing challenges.<sup>6</sup>

### **Recommendations**

- Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) requests the Special Rapporteur on the right to Environment to present more reports and on the environmental conditions in Yemen and the destruction of country's environment as a result of coalition attacks.
- According to paragraph 3 of Article 35 of the Protocol I additional to the Geneva Convention (1977), "It is prohibited to employ methods or means of warfare which are intended, or may be expected, to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment." Therefore, ODVV calls upon the international community to prevent coalition forces attacks and the destruction of the environment in Yemen, based on this Article.
- ODVV calls on the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Rights of the Child to launch extensive and targeted investigations into Yemeni children's conditions and the negative impact of the conflict and coalition attacks on them, and submit the findings to the Human Rights Council.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/over-5-million-children-face-threatcholera-and-acute-water-diarrhea-midst-covid-19>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-addresses-un-security-council-yemen-news>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/yemen.html>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://per.euronew.com/2020/09/26/yemen-two-million-children-are-out-of-school>.