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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.

[19 August 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Situation of Afghanistani Refugees in Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to host one of the largest and most protracted refugee populations of the world that include Afghan and Iraqi refugees who have been in Iran for over three decades. According to published figures currently there are approximately one million Afghan and twenty-five thousand Iraqi refugees residing in Iran. These refugees are mostly in urban areas and less than three percent of them are living in refugee camps.

The presence of this number of refugees has caused various challenges for the host population, the government and the refugees themselves in the areas of education, livelihood and medical treatment.

Education:

In May 2015 the Iranian Supreme Leader in an edict stated: “No Afghan child, not even migrants who are illegally and undocumented in Iran, must be deprived of education and they must all be registered in Iranian schools.” This is commendable with regards to efforts to realise the right of all children to enjoy their fundamental rights i.e. the right to education. With this edict almost 400,000 Afghan and Iraqi children have been able to register in official Iranian schools. In the 2015-16 and 2016-17 education years, approximately 77,000 undocumented Afghan children have registered in schools. Because of the rising demand of education services, international organizations such as the UNHCR have also increased their assistance for the development of the education infrastructures of the country. These assistances however have not been able to answer all education needs and have faced by the increase in the number of students in Iranian schools and schools being open in two shifts.

Livelihood:

Refugees in Iran, particularly men between the ages of 18 and 60 must get a work permit to be able to work legally in the country. Although management of refugees’ employment is very important, due to the limitations on the jobs allowed for refugees, most refugees are faced with problems with getting jobs, and this has caused the exploitation of employers and other relevant individuals, and facilitates the basis for jobs on the black market. Furthermore the issue of inflation and the effects of sanctions imposed against Iran, have affected refugees more than other groups in society and their livelihoods are faced with challenges.

Health

The Iranian Ministry of Health, provides refugees with health services such as vaccination, medical treatment and emergency services, particularly for patients with special diseases on equal terms as Iranians. The presentation of health insurance for refugees began in 2011 with the cooperation of the UNHCR and to-date is renewed annually. More than 120,000 vulnerable refugees and those suffering from special diseases are included in this insurance. In spite of all efforts, vulnerable groups of refugees who have been left out of these programmes, do not get any insurance and even though all refugees, both vulnerable and non-vulnerable have access to health services without discrimination, not having health insurance, is a heavy financial burden to those refugees that have not been successful in getting insurance; and due to the high cost of some medical services, they are faced with continuation of their medical treatment.

Recommendations:

- - The conditions in Afghanistan are not safe enough for the repatriation of all refugees, due to the presence of extremist groups (Al-Qaeda and ISIS) and also foreign troops, which have resulted in an escalation of clashes and civilian deaths in the current year, therefore the international community, led by the United Nations, must in a more serious way help the Afghan government to establish stability in the country which will facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees.
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- - In view of the aforementioned conditions it is estimated that a large number of the refugee population will remain in Iran, who seek access to health, education and livelihood services in the country. Therefore in view of the various factors such as the economic reforms of the Iranian government with regards to the removal of subsidies of vital goods and energy, for the purpose of increasing the capacity of the host society and empowerment of the refugee population to get their basic needs and expansion of their access to the aforementioned services, the international community must have a more highlighted presence in providing services and financial aid to NGOs, the UN and also the Iranian government.
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- - The Iranian government must make efforts for refugees to have access to more jobs, something that will improve their livelihood conditions, and also to block any form of exploitations from taking place.
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- - In view of the possibility of increasing the acceptance of refugees and asylum-seekers and undocumented individuals in Iranian schools, the need to construct schools and also education assistance have been doubled. The support of international community, the UN and some donor countries can help in the continuation of taking in more people in education centres.
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- - Increase in the eligibility of refugees (particularly vulnerable groups) in the Universal Public Health Insurance can notably reduce their health and medical treatment problems.
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- - Any form of sanctions that are imposed on citizens, either directly or indirectly, is condemned. The refugees are the first victims of these sanctions, the sanctions affect their income, result in their movement to Western countries, creating life threatening dangers for the refugees in their journeys and causing problems for the host and third countries.