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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 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.

[22 January 2024]

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



The Compulsory Conscription Law and the Ban on Religious Visits Imposed on Druze Sect, Arab-48

Prohibiting religious visits to holy sites and enforcing mandatory military service on the Druze sect are violations of basic human rights. The report addresses: 1. Preventing the members of Druze community in Israel from conducting religious visits to sacred places in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon for religious rituals and family visits. 2. Repealing the mandatory conscription law imposed forcibly on Druze individuals in Israel since 1956, making it optional. The majority of Druze community in the Middle East reside in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, and Israel, forming a religious minority in their respective countries. Preserving brotherhood is a fundamental religious duty for them, and one of the most important religious and social duties has become the organization of annual visits to the tombs of God's prophets and saints, the establishment of religious rituals, as well as addressing their personal matters. For over 100 years, Druze clerics (sheikhs) and members of the sect have annually gathered for four significant religious visits: 1. Visit to the shrine of Prophet Shuaib - peace be upon him, in Israel 2. Visit to the shrine of Prophet Habil - pbup in the Syrian Arab Republic. 3. Visit to the shrine of Prophet Ayuob - pbup in Lebanon. 4. Visit to the Bayada retreats in Lebanon, which is considered the spiritual reference for all Druze worldwide.

These visits were normal before the establishment of Israel in 1948 and have been prohibited since then. Recognizing their religious and social value, "The Druze Communication Committee for Arab-48" was formed, which includes sheikhs and youth representing all members of the sect, with the aim to solidify and restore these visits. Israel has decided to forcibly prevent Druze sheikhs from visiting their shrines in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, unlike other religious communities and even Jews who are facilitated and granted permits for visits to their holy sites in Arab countries. Despite numerous attempts, including an appeal to the Supreme Court of Justice and dozens of official letters sent to government offices, the Druze in Israel have been unsuccessful in reclaiming their rights. The actions of the Israeli government constitute a violation of the basic human rights of the Druze community, as religious principles, international laws, logic, and justice guarantee the right to worship, conduct religious rituals, and maintain communication with family and relatives. The Syrian state and the Lebanese state have welcomed these visits through Jordanian territories, but Israel has consistently obstructed and prevented them. We hope that your esteemed council exerts every possible effort to pressure Israel for the supremacy of justice, the right to movement, and religious privacy, represented in our demands for religious and family visits.

Regarding the mandatory conscription law imposed on Druze community in Israel, it's important to note that Druze Arabs in Israel belong to the monotheistic faith and considered a religious minority within the Arab minority in Israel, and since 1948, Israel has worked to separate them from their people inside and outside the country, implementing several laws and procedures aimed at transforming them into a nationality separate from the Arab identity. Since 1948, Druze Arabs, numbering around 13,000 at the time, out of a total of 150,000 Palestinians who remained in their land, have refused to serve in the Israeli army. Where in 1954, Israel issued an order to conscript all Arab sects in Israel, sending 4,520 conscription notices to non-Druze Arab youth, where about 4,000 registered initially, but Israel backed down from that, and Ben-Gurion expressed then his reservations about conscripting Arabs. In 1956, Israel imposed mandatory conscription on Druze Arabs, despite significant opposition from the majority of the Druze community. The resistance against conscription has continued to this day, exceeding a 50% refusal rate. This coincides with a growing trend of volunteering for the army among other Arab minorities in Israel, who now outnumber Druze in the military. Druze conscription objectors face military trials, and sentences of several years in prison are sometimes issued. It's crucial to mention that international law on minority rights prohibits compulsory conscription. We hope that your esteemed council makes every possible effort to pressure Israel to repeal this law and make conscription optional, especially after Israel enacted the Nation-State Law, emphasizing the Jewish nature of the state.