



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

Twenty-seventh session

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 the Al-khoei Foundation, a non-governmental organization in general 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 August 2014]

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

GE.14-14807 (E)



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## **The Need to Protect Children in the Unfolding Conflicts in Iraq and Syria**

The Al-khoei Foundation is submitting this statement to appeal to the Special Representatives of the Secretary General on Violence against Children and Children and Armed Conflict as well as the Iraqi and Syrian governments for greater monitoring and protection of children in Iraq and Syria.

The ongoing armed conflicts in Iraq and Syria have resulted in unprecedented levels of violence and harm to all sectors of society but have uniquely affected children and young people who, more than any other group in society, are likely to be unheard and not consulted on the impact of what is happening to them and around them.

As noted by the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict, the changing nature of warfare and conflict have made children ever more vulnerable due to new tactics of war, the increasing number and diversity of parties involved in conflict, the unclear front lines of the battlefield and the deliberate targeting or lack of safe heavens like places of worship, schools and hospitals.

Al-khoei Foundation notes that for children in Iraq and Syria the crippling consequences of conflict that include sectarian violence by state and non-state actors and the rising power and impunity of terrorist groups like the so called Islamic State (IS) and in the case of Iraq, the long history of war with Iran, Kuwait and most recently in 2003, have resulted in a case of continual psychological trauma, increasing erosion of rights and safety.

The media, humanitarian and civil society NGOs, both internationally and locally, have documented some of the violations committed against children. We noted with particular concern the abduction, sexual exploitation and murder of children by terrorist organisations like IS, Al-Nusra and other jihadi groups who have subjected and used children as weapons of violence based on their religious and ethnic affiliation.

We concur with the Special Representative of the United Nation in Iraq, Mr. Nicolay Mladenov and the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura in their condemnation of the targeting of sexual violence against women, teenage girls and boys from Iraq's diverse ethnic and religious communities. They cited that up to 1500 Yazidi and Christian persons may have been forced into sexual slavery. We also believe that such acts should be investigated and where appropriate considers as war crimes and crimes against humanity for which the perpetrators should be brought to justice.

The increased vulnerability of children during conflict has given rise to the capture and kidnapping of the girl child by these groups for the purposes of sexual slavery, 'jihadi marriage' and conversion which is abhorrent to all and is in no way endorsed by Islam. Furthermore, we urge the Special Representatives of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict to push for further investigation of the recruitment of child soldiers, that is, forcing young boys to join these jihadi groups, indoctrinating them in violence in the name of Islam, forcing them to watch macabre execution videos and using them as suicide bombers, instructing them to plan bombs or training them as snipers. Media coverage in the UK and internationally have highlighted the kidnapping in June of over 140 Kurdish school boys by IS where they were forced to watch videos of beheadings and received instruction in so called 'Sharia' law'. Human rights organisations have detailed how young boys and teenagers have taken part in armed conflict, pressured and threatened to sign volunteer lists for suicide missions, act as snipers, manned check points and carried munitions and other supplies to the front line in Syria and Iraq.

The psychological and physical trauma experienced by children as a result of the above acts and violations can have long lasting impact and result in children spending their lifetime dealing with their consequences. Apart from death, the physical and health problems that can afflict children caught in the cross fire or participation in armed conflict means further vulnerability and barriers to be over come, such as physical disability, chronic health problems, maiming and loss of limbs, sight or speech. Quite apart from dealing with the direct impact of this, child survivors tend to end their

education prematurely, because of the time taken for recovery, the lack of specialist educational provisions or practical changes that can be made to wheel chair users or blind people for example.

Many children have their right to education compromised when they become the main carers for their parent(s) and or siblings. Numerous reports by UNICEF, UN General Secretary's office, Save the Children and UNHCR cites the devastating consequences of conflict in Iraq and Syria on education and the lives of children. Gender here, has a specific dynamic to play where on the whole, though not exclusively, boys' education is disrupted or terminated in favour of work and entry into economic activity which in turn exposes them to risks of sexual exploitation, child labour and recruitment into criminal gangs. Girls, however, are pressured and in some cases forced into marriage and into child marriage instead of education to ease the burden on their families, ensure the child and family's safety (particularly if there is one parent or if the family is headed by a woman only) and notion of honour. According to International Centre for the Research on Women, marriage before the age of 18 can increase vulnerability to domestic abuse. For many children in Iraq and Syria these tragic consequences are unfolding daily with very little access to support or means to control what is happening to them, their education or future.

The Al-khoei Foundation calls on all international organisations, all United Nations agencies concerned with the welfare and rights of children, and in particular the offices of the Special Representatives of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children and Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to:

- Vigorously campaign and bring to the international media's attention abuses against children in all conflict zones including Iraq and Syria.
- Investigate all acts of violence and harm that could be tried in international courts under the offence of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, committed by anyone involved in the military conflict in Iraq and Syria.
- To pressure States into condemning these violations and pledge to assist in bringing perpetrators to justice.

Al-khoei Foundation calls on all states to:

- Work closely with UN bodies and international agencies to support the accountability and due process where war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity particularly affecting children have been shown to take place and where their citizens have been partaking in these acts.
- We ask the Iraqi and Syrian governments to pay particular attention to the welfare and suffering of Iraqi and Syrian children when formulating policies, humanitarian assistance and relief operations.
- We also urge them to make a serious effort to consult and seek the views of children, where harm to the child does not result due to consultation, on the abuses against them and how children and young people's views can remain central to any policies and projects aimed at supporting them and their families.