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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by the Organisation internationale pour les pays les moins avancés (OIPMA), 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.

[8 February 2019]

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



Child recruitment in Yemen: Challenges faced by the United Nations Bodies

The “Organisation Internationale pour les pays les Moins Avancés” (OIPMA) / The International Organization for Least Developed Countries (IOLDCs) focuses among other issues, on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in some Least Developed Countries (LDCs), including Yemen.

The phenomenon of child recruitment is a common feature of all terrorist groups, usually establishing training camps for this purpose.

In Yemen, there is a historical and ongoing spread of extremism, instigating to hate and intolerance. Since decades, it has been included in the school’s curriculum this extremist ideology. Moreover, before the war, this ideology was spread in mosque, TV channels and public events, brainwashing vulnerable children and young people.

This phenomenon began with Al-Qaida and Ansar al-Shariah. Later, was practised by ISIS and the Al-Houthi. In fact, the Houthi senior leader admitted to the Associated Press that the Houthis have brought 18,000 child soldiers to their army since 2014.

Likewise, the Islah party (the Muslim Brotherhood) also practices child recruitment in Yemen, using the camps of the Yemeni government forces currently under the power of the Islah Party which dominates the decision-making in the Yemeni government.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has included the Houthi militia, the Government forces and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula for the second time in the annual "list of shame" for gross violations of children during the armed conflict. However, the methods of the Al-Qaida and the Houthis militias have evolved from indoctrinating school students, brainwashing and obliging them to be devoted by the spirit of hostility, violence, hatred and love for fighting. They have convinced them about their duty to fight against Israel and the United States of America, as the shortest route to paradise.

Moreover, although the pledge made by Abdul Malik Badr al-Din, the leader of the Houthi militia to stop child recruitment in Yemen during his meeting with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in November 2012, child recruitment has rather escalated.

The evidence collected by observers of OIPMA, the years following the pledge by the Houthi leader, indicated a significant and systematic increase in the recruitment and use of children by the Houthis militia over the past 3 years.

In the areas controlled by the Yemeni Government, from decades a fertile environment has been formed to attract, mobilize and brainwash children in the name of religion by the Islah Party (in practice Muslim Brotherhood), Al-Qaida and ISIS in Yemen.

Radical leaders of the Islah Party, including those internationally classified as terrorists, have attracted and recruited children on behalf of Al-Qaida provided its convenient relationships with the Yemeni army in Marib, Shabwa, Abyan, Taz and Hadramout. Children are brainwashed and trained on the use of weapons and they are used in suicide missions.

On 18 December 2018, the Ministry of Human Rights in Yemen signed a roadmap with UNICEF's representative to stop the recruitment of children.

However, provided that the data of UNICEF accounts for just 1,467 children recruited during the year 2017 whereas the real number is dramatically higher, OIPMA believes that it is difficult to consider that the roadmap will effectively deal with the cessation of all children recruited in Yemen, including the hidden numbers.

The crime of recruiting and engaging children in armed conflict has been of utmost importance for the Security Council. However, the Secretary-General's annual reports to the Security Council on child recruitment in Yemen did not raise the need of a response to the Security Council. This was due to the lack of accurate and adequate information provided by the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) regarding the escalation of child recruitment in Yemen.

According to several reports from local, regional and international organizations on the recruitment of children by the Houthis from 2015 to 2018, between 18,000 to 25,000 children in Yemen have been recruited. However, the United Nations MRM has stated in their communications that individual cases do not exceed hundreds (at best) and ignored further information and sources showing the magnification and seriousness of this phenomenon, essential to reducing its escalation and final cessation.

Having considered the reports based on MRM reports, OIPMA stresses that the efforts made by the United Nations in addressing child recruitment in Yemen have not really reflected the words of the Secretary-General to “*take the necessary preventive and protective measures*”.

According to the latest report presented at both the General Assembly and the Security Council, it has not been documented the real numbers of child soldiers in Yemen.

In accordance with the United Nations internal regulations, the United Nations Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and the coordinators of United Nations agencies residing in Yemen, bear responsibility for the accuracy of the information contained in the reports.

The words used by Ms. Virginia Gamba (Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) in a briefing on her report to the Security Council highly expressed the situation of children in armed conflict globally, which indeed equally applies to Yemen. Ms. Gamba stressed “*We are all to blame. We have the tools and resources to better protect children, even in situations of armed conflict; but we have failed to do so. [...] The international community must act today to end the impact of conflict on children wherever possible, to prevent their future participation and to help affected children recover from violent conflict. [...] Let us now work to remind future generations of what we have done to better protect children affected by armed conflict rather than what we have failed to do*”.

The above speech highly describes the lack of effective measures taken regarding child recruitment in Yemen. In particular, the report submitted by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on 26th December 2018, A/HRC/40/49, failed to indicate the escalation on child recruitment in Yemen, that was earlier recognized by the Houthis.

For this reason, OIPMA believes that these aftermaths need to be faced by the United Nations mechanisms with a related mandate, to stop child recruitment in Yemen and hold into account the perpetrators, according to international humanitarian law and international human rights law to protect children in armed conflict.

Otherwise, the resolutions, treaties and conventions protecting children in armed would remain without meaning.

The increasing child recruitment by the Houthis in Yemen requires an MRM which ensures that the information is obtained in a manner consistent with the humanitarian principles of the United Nations.

Therefore, OIPMA calls upon the Human Rights Council to adopt a resolution requesting the Panel of Experts to focus on child recruitment in Yemen and to submit accurate and reliable information. The resolution should put pressure in the release of children, mainly recruited by the Houthis.

OIPMA requests the High Commissioner for Human Rights to take the necessary measures to stop child recruitment in Yemen, by strengthening the role of their field offices.

Moreover, OIPMA recommends the UN Secretary-General that strengthening the MRM should be a major priority for the UN. Children's lives depend on it.

The Organization urges him to review and scrutinize the tasks assigned to the MRM, providing them with specialized advisers in the protection of children recruited in armed conflict.

In addition, OIPMA recommends the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to take appropriate measures to ensure the implementation of both Article 1 and 2 of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified by Yemen.

The Organization recommends UNICEF Executive Director to give meaning to the latest plan of action signed with the Yemeni Government. This could include regular country visits inspecting the child recruitment situation in order to follow-up this phenomenon and to monitor the numbers of children recruited and released after the entry into force of the action plan. Likewise, OIPMA urges UNICEF to cooperate with entities such as the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and the Emirates Red Crescent in order to contribute with positive inputs in the rehabilitation and reintegration of children in Yemen.

Lastly, OIPMA urges to all the UN bodies with a mandate on children in armed conflict to take into consideration the recommendations given by H.E Olof Skoog, ambassador of Sweden (member of the Security Council) and chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in his letter sent to the President of the UN Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict on 12 December 2018. For instance, *“How we treat children affected by armed conflict has a bearing on their future and the future of their communities and their countries. Shielding children from the worst effects of war will improve the chances of preventing new cycles of conflict and sustaining peace in the future”*.
