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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 Society for Threatened Peoples, 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.

[16 February 2015]

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

Children in armed conflict (Item 3) - Children suffering from armed conflict in Nigeria, Cameroon and Sudan

Society for Threatened Peoples is appalled by the impact of the Boko Haram crisis on children in northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon. The escalating violence and bloodshed has led to the closure of more than 800 schools especially in the Nigerian State of Borno. Some 194,660 children were forced out of school in Borno State in the year 2014. In comparison in the year 2012, some 14 schools were burnt down by radical Islamists in Borno, forcing 7,000 children and students out of formal education and pushing down enrolment rates in an already ill-educated region. Traditionally, school enrolment is already lower in Borno than in any other state in Nigeria, according to official Nigerian data. But the deliberate attacks against schools, the burning down of educational institutions and the kidnapping of hundreds of students had a massive impact on education in impoverished northern Nigeria. The targeting of schools has led children in neighboring schools to stay home or drop out completely for fear of further attacks. Staff attendance at schools has also dwindled, many teachers have left the area for fear of intimidation and attacks. The breakdown of the education system in northeastern Nigeria will have a disastrous impact on all efforts to achieve more equality and a better livelihood in longtime neglected northern Nigeria.

Children, youth and women are the most important group among the 3.3 million Internal Displaced People (IDP) and the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have searched for protection in neighboring countries. Unfortunately Nigerian authorities were unable to ensure their protection. More than 1.6 million IDP from Borno's rural areas have been seeking for protection in the State capital Maiduguri. But even in Maiduguri there was no permanent protection for them. Several times since January 2015, Boko Haram fighters attacked the city and intimidated the traumatized IDP's. Children are the main victims of the campaign of intimidation and terror which has been imposed by Boko Haram on the civilian population. Some 70 percent of all 877 civilians who were abducted by radical Islamists since January 2014 were children or youth. The case of the 219 Chibok girls, aged between 15 and 19 years, who were kidnapped in April 2014 has raised national and international attention. Despite appeals by famous international personalities to free the girls, even ten months after their abduction there are no news regarding their fate. Nigerian security forces have failed to obtain the liberation of the students who became a symbol in the suffering of children in the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria. Abducted girls who succeeded in evading have reported about widespread sexual assault and rape in custody of the Boko Haram sect. The youth and their family members are traumatized and will need medical and psychological care for a long time.

Boko Haram's war against children is a crime against humanity. No more than 10 to 15 year old girls have been abused by the terrorist factions to enter into government controlled cities and to detonate powerful explosives at markets and other crowded public spaces. On January 10, 2015, a ten year old girl has detonated a bomb concealed under her veil at a market in Maiduguri, killing as many as 20 people and wounding many more. Boko Haram started to use female suicide bombers in June 2014 after the army, police and militias strengthened the security in bigger cities. When the security forces became aware of the new terrorist tactics, they started to abuse children and youth as suicide bombers to get access to crowded public areas.

Furthermore, children and youth are used by all conflict parties as child soldiers. Children and youth make now up to 40 percent of the insurgents' total strength of around 60.000 fighters. On the side of the government affiliated Civilian joint Task Force of self-defense militias children are nearly a quarter of the more than 10.000 fighters.

In neighboring northern Cameroon the security situation has started to deteriorate in autumn 2014. Since that time brutal attacks by Boko Haram fighters on schools, public transport, villages and cities dramatically have increased. Many schools had to close down and international development projects for children had to be stopped. Once again children are suffering most from the escalation of violence in the region. Cameroon security forces have become overwhelmed by the attacks from neighboring Nigeria and are unable to ensure the protection of children.

In Sudan children and youth still are suffering from the escalation of armed conflict in the five Darfur provinces and in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Widely ignored by the international community fighting, violence, lawlessness and impunity in the Darfur provinces have increased in the years 2014/2015. Most violence against the civilian population has been committed by the state-affiliated "Rapid Support Forces (RSF)". The RSF are organized and commanded by

the “National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS)”. Systematically, the RSF, which has been used by the army and government to fight the insurgents, has been intimidating and terrorizing the civilian population in the Darfur provinces. Nearly every week new incidents have been documented by the Society for Threatened Peoples. A typical incident occurred on February 4/5, 2015, in the villages of Um Siyala and Mursal in North Darfur Province. A group of militiamen on camels torched all 300 houses, assaulted the inhabitants and robbed their belongings. Most inhabitants of the villages are women, elderly people and children. The Sudanese president Omar Hassan al Bashir repeatedly has justified the actions of RSF lauding the militiamen as “martyrs who defend the country”. Sudanese politicians who criticized the RSF for committing violence and rapes, have been arrested and accused to undermine the constitutional order and to disturb public peace.

Some 457,000 Darfuris had to leave their villages in the year 2014 due to the escalation of violence. Several hundred thousands of these new IDP were children. They and their mothers were searching for protection in IDP camps, but even in and around these camps militiamen are terrorizing children and women. Rapes of young girls searching for fire wood near the camps are common place.

Aerial bombardment by the Sudanese Air Force has caused the death of dozens of children in the Jebel Marra Darfur region, in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Since years the Security Council of the United Nations has urged the Sudanese Government to stop bombing the civilian population, but the air raids still are continuing.

Living conditions for children in conflicts areas in Sudan steadily have been deteriorating due to the deliberate blocking of access for international humanitarian agencies in rebel-controlled areas in South Kordofan by the Sudanese authorities.

The abuse of children as child soldiers is widespread among all conflict parties in Sudan. There is an urgent need to call on all armed forces to abusing minors.

We are calling on the Human Rights Council:

to urge the Government of Sudan:

- to immediately stop aerial bombing of the civilian population in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur and to provide humanitarian access for aid agencies in all conflict areas,
- to disarm and to demilitarize the Rapid Support Forces, to end impunity in Darfur and to provide more protection for girls against harassment and rape in conflict regions,

to urge the Government of Nigeria:

- to provide more efficient protection to the civilian population and especially to schools and students,
- to encourage more efforts to free the Chibok girls and all other abducted civilians,
- to respect the basic human rights of children and the civilian population.