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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

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.

[13 August 2020]

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

A Children's Emergency: Rohingya war children and children born of war are in urgent need of recognition and support

By today, over half a million Rohingya children are displaced. They make up almost 60% of all Rohingya refugees, making the genocide against the Rohingya truly a children's emergency. They were babies, toddlers and adolescents when the genocide started in August 2017. They witnessed atrocities committed against their family members and they saw their villages and neighbourhoods go up in flames. Some were born as a result of genocidal rape.

Crimes were committed specifically against Rohingya children and often with revolting brutality: children were killed or injured by rapists while the children's mothers were being raped; children were left to burn to death in their homes as villages were set on fire; and young children, including unborn babies, were violently killed. Rapes were specifically committed against females of reproductive age. About half of all rape victims were underage girls, some as young as nine years old. In total 6,000 to 10,000 underage girls were raped. Most of those who survived are severely traumatized. Many of the girls became pregnant.

Children born of war conceived in rapes of Rohingya girls and women by Burmese soldiers experience extraordinary challenges. Due to the stigma attached to the circumstances of their conception, many mothers give their children up for informal adoption in the camps in Bangladesh. These unwanted children are in imminent danger of being trafficked and at heightened risk of radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups. Mothers who decide to keep their children are often ostracized by their families and communities. The children themselves face a life of poverty, health issues, neglect and limited opportunity. Some mothers are unable to provide for the children. Many of the children do not have sufficient access to healthcare; major dangers for these children are untreated HIV and mental health issues. Some mothers struggle to accept the children, which can lead to neglect, abuse or psychological trauma to the children. Even if the overall situation of Rohingya children were to improve, children born of war would likely not experience a similar improvement in quality of life, thereby widening the gap between children born of war and other Rohingya children. If the situation remains unchanged, hundreds to thousands of children born of war will probably face lives as outsiders with severe psychological trauma and socio-economic adversities and they will likely remain at risk of exploitation, abuse and radicalization.

The circumstances in the refugee camps in Bangladesh are desperate and especially harsh for children. They lack access to proper education, are exposed to unsafe living conditions in the crowded camps, and face rising rates of child marriage and an imminent risk to human trafficking, amongst other issues.

The Rohingya war children and children born of war have survived genocide. They do not deserve to become a lost generation. They have the right to a future in dignity.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the U.N. Human Rights Council to urge the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to:

- Protect all children in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar from human trafficking, radicalization, domestic and sexual abuse, and exploitation. For this, infrastructure such as lighting and roads and an overall increased protection and law enforcement are needed. Special care should be taken to protect children born of war, as they are particularly vulnerable.
- Make medical and psychological treatment accessible to all children, including children born of war. The prevalent invisibility of children born of war and their risk for intergenerational and early-childhood trauma should be kept in mind. They and their mothers should have access to counselling and treatment when needed. Children who witnessed atrocities committed against family members should have access to psychological treatment.
- Implement and support community measures addressing stigma attached to children born of war in order to alleviate the social exclusion and vulnerability as a marginalized group for children born of war and their mothers.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the U.N. Human Rights Council to urge the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to:

- Live up to its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Rohingya children deserve a future. The Rohingya need to be recognized as a minority of Myanmar; all Rohingya must be granted effective citizenship; Myanmar needs to dismantle the discriminatory system of apartheid against the Rohingya community and abolish all relevant laws and regulations; and Myanmar authorities and its wider population need to combat the culture of discrimination on racial, ethnic, or religious grounds.

