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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.

[01 February 2021]

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

Yazidi and Rohingya Children born of Sexual Violence need urgent Help amid Risk of Trafficking and Abuse

The year 2021 marks the seventh year after the genocide was committed against the Yazidis in the North of the Republic of Iraq. The youngest victims of the genocide are babies and children up to six years of age who were born out of rapes committed against their enslaved Yazidi mothers. Hundreds of captured Yazidi women are still missing. Many of them are still forced to live with their ISIS captors.

The situation for these children born of war is dramatic. Many of them live in dire conditions in refugee camps, such as Al Hol camp in the northern Syrian Arab Republic. The children in the camps usually live with their mothers and their ISIS captors. Mothers who want to leave ISIS can usually only do so in exchange for a ransom and are forced to leave behind their children fathered by ISIS fighters. This is due to Yazidi traditions and Iraqi laws. Many mothers leave their children behind against their will after being threatened or deceived to do so. They usually cannot relocate their children afterwards. Some of the children have ended up in orphanages in Syria and Iraq where they face unregulated adoption, usually without the knowledge and consent of their mothers. In general, none of these children have birth certificates, they are severely traumatised and as persons associated with ISIS they face stigma in various communities. These are early warning signs for the sale and exploitation of children born of war.

Such early warning signs also exist in relation to children born of war in the context of the genocide against the Rohingya in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Following the 2017 genocide, presumably hundreds to thousands of children were born out of sexual violence. The children born of war and their mothers are facing acute discrimination. They are being marginalised within their community in the literal sense of the word: on the fringes of the refugee camps in Kutupalong in the People's Republic of Bangladesh, there are now dwellings solely of mothers and their children born of war. These mothers and children are in imminent need of protection due to their vulnerable position within the camp and within their community. The lack of economic means of the mothers and the stigma attached to children born of war have already prompted a wave of unregulated adoptions and trafficking. The new areas of settlement for mothers and children born of war on the fringes of Kutupalong may worsen the danger of trafficking and abuse for the children and mothers, some of whom are minors themselves.

Based on research relating to past conflicts such as the Rwandan genocide and the civil war in Northern Uganda, children born of war are at great risk of re-victimisation due to their vulnerable position in society. Children born of war often lack birth certificates, registration and a loving home, making them prone to illegal adoption, child labour, sexual exploitation, early marriage, military recruitment and human trafficking.

Society for Threatened Peoples therefore calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of the Republic of Iraq to:

- combat statelessness of children born of war whose mothers are Iraqi nationals and change regulations and laws on compulsory registration of these children as Muslim,
- support freeing Yazidi Iraqi nationals from ISIS captivity without separating mothers and children and thereby risking trafficking or illegal adoption,
- ensure the provision of services, livelihood support and reparations to survivors and children born of war,
- bring the perpetrators to justice.

In addition, Society for Threatened Peoples calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to:

- actively protect children born of war and their mothers from trafficking, sexual abuse and other dangers by installing safety measures, supplying essential goods and services, ensuring mothers can communicate via internet and telephone and providing psychological treatment within the respective areas of Kutupalong camp,
- actively seek and permit the support of local and international NGOs aiming at supporting children born of war and their mothers within the camp,
- actively support the investigation of atrocities committed against the Rohingya, including Rohingya children and children born of war by international mechanisms.

Furthermore, Society for Threatened Peoples calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to urge the international community to:

- support the abovementioned countries in their efforts to protect children born of war,
- recognize children born of war as victims of war and genocide and include this particular group of victims in all considerations regarding humanitarian aid, justice initiatives and diplomatic relations with all concerned states and in all contexts of wartime rape or widespread sexual violence.

The Children Born of War Project and Joint Help for Kurdistan, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.