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Human rights bodies and mechanisms

Written statement* submitted by Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society, 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.

[05 October 2020]

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

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Requesting that the United Nations protects IAPSRS and its key members from arbitrary detention and unlawful interference

The Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society (IAPSRS) is a long-established non-governmental organization (NGO), with the mission of eradicating poverty and social exclusion by empowering women and children of marginalized neighborhoods throughout the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) and the Middle East. IAPSRS is one of the major volunteer-based NGOs with more than 20 years in operation. We currently have 44 facilities in marginalized neighborhoods, which provide vital support to over 6800 children and already saved 50 children and juveniles from execution. IAPSRS is accredited with general consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and has consistently played an active role at numerous United Nations (UN) events, such as the annual sessions of the Human Rights Council and the Commission on the Status of Women, by contributing toward the advancement of sustainable development goals.

We would like to bring to Human Rights Council's attentions the recent threats to our organization. On June 21, 2020, three members of IAPSRS, Sharmin Meymandi Nejad (founder), Morteza Keymanesh (board member and media director), Katayoun Afrazeh (substitute auditor) have been arrested by security forces through a coordinated raid on their homes, without formal charges.

Mr. Keymanesh, Ms. Afrazeh have been released on bail on 21 and 22 July respectively, but Mr. Meymandi Nejad is still detained, for more than 106 days on the day of submitting this statement. He has been denied access to call his family for 20 days and meeting them for 55 days.

On 30 July, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, expressed her concern regarding the issue and asked the Iranian authorities to stop the arrests and interference in IAPSRS's work.

In recent months, there have been several petitions and supporting letters issued by journalists and members of the media, and different communities such as attorneys to the Chief Justice of Iran.

On September 6, Zahra Rahimi, the Chief Executive Officer of IAPSRS, was called up to the Court for interrogation but was released on bail two days later.

Through Mr. Meymani Nejad's last call, we were informed of Sharmin's health condition which is in serious danger. He expressed severe bone pain due to diseases and needs a walker to be able to walk. He has been suffering from Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) with symptoms of chronic pain with the stiffness and severe bone pains. Due to his history of hospitalization, weakness of the respiratory system and pneumonia, he desperately needs care in a calm and stress-free environment. IAPSRS demands his immediate release to pursue treatment.

Mr. Meymandi Nejad, a writer and theatre artist who has spent 20 years in marginalized sections of Iran to establish IAPSRS and encouraged thousands of people to participate in the civil society with peace, is probably subject to severe sentences which put his life at stake.

Currently, we are under pressure to curtail our advocacy activities. IAPSRS, has been threatened by revocation of the organization's license, which could result in either dissolving IAPSRS as a whole or its complete subversion through replacing key missions and personnel.

During the last three months, we have received several verbal and written notices to reshape our organizational structure and replace the board members in an unprovoked infringement of our legal rights.

We are deeply concerned about the future of our organization, its operations, its contributions to the United Nations Council meetings, and our international collaborations with other organizations, particularly during the economic hardships caused by international sanctions and the global pandemic in recent months.

We would like to kindly ask UN to support IAPSRs in pushing back against threats according to the international human rights laws.
