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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 Protection of Street & Working Children, 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.

[27 January 2021]

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



Negative Effect of Air Pollution on the Health of Working and Street Children

Enjoying clean air and a healthy environment is among children's rights. According to Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to access best health services, safe water and clean air and a healthy environment.

Childhood is the most important stage of every human life for physical and mental development. During these years, a child's body grows and prepares him for future life so, it is important for a child to have a healthy soul, mind and body.

The environment is one of the most important factors affecting children. Every child should be able to breathe clean air to have a healthy body that helps his talents to fully develop and flourish. Tedros Adhanom, the head of the World Health Organization estimates that approximately one in 10 deaths, caused by air pollution, is attributed to children under the age of five worldwide. Environmental pollution makes a child's life unhealthy, because the child's body absorbs more pollution and the damage to children's cells will never be compensated.

Children are dependent, weak and unable to protect their rights or protest against violation of their rights and it is the governments' duty to provide suitable living conditions for all people, especially children. However, adults should also play a constructive role in demanding the governments meet their commitments.

For many years, many Middle Eastern countries have faced the negligence of country officials towards air pollution; unilateral sanctions; escalation of economic and social crises (including poverty, injustice, income inequality, unemployment, etc.). It goes without saying that, in today's world, air pollution has become one of the most complex and, of course, permanent problems in the lives of people around the world, including the emission of greenhouse gases and dust particles that remain suspended in the air.

Recently, scientists have focused on a type of dust particle called PM 2.5, which is generated by a variety of sources, including domestic vehicle engines and power plants. Unfortunately, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, this type of pollution is high, due to the production of non-standard cars, using unhealthy fuels such as fuel oil and diesel. Regrettably, there is no transparency on the true source of the pollution, and at the same time, its negative impact on children and the elderly, who are more vulnerable, has been quite evident in recent years.

Because the working and street children are forced to spend long hours outdoors, they are affected by the destructive effects of polluted air due to their physical weakness.

In recent years, the United Nations has conducted a study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) entitled "Clean Air for Children", which states that one in seven children in the world breathes polluted air. According to the report, polluted air causes death for children.

The report quotes Anthony League, the Executive Director of UNICEF, saying that air pollution is the main cause of poisoning and death of 600,000 children annually.

The skin is the body's first and widest barrier against environmental pollutants, smoke and airborne chemicals, the direct effects of which include eczema, hives, eye irritation itching and wounds. In addition, the indirect effects, include destructive effects on memory, nausea, dizziness, gastrointestinal diseases, depression, lack of concentration and maladaptive behaviors. Air pollution leaves a negative effect on the brain cells of children who are growing up.

One of the most effective solutions is bathing and washing hands and face, which are exposed to pollution, but the working children do not have easy access to showers and the second solution is not to spend time outdoors in polluted air, which is inevitable for these children.

What should we do? The solution is in the hands of the nation and the government. The nation must be demanding and in some cases should co-operate with the government by using public transport instead of personal vehicles and the government must allocate the necessary budget while coordinating various sectors to address the problem.

The Society for Protection of Street and Working Children (SPWSC) has always adopted a Social Demand Approach toward the government as one of its main goals, in addition to offering independent services to vulnerable sectors of society in order to improve the realization of children's rights.

Today, our environment is more damaged than ever and is also prone to further damages. Environment should be a suitable place for human beings, so we have a mission to ensure a healthy, sustainable and suitable environment for children who are the future generation of society so that we will have healthy and efficient people for sustainable growth and development. We need to teach the children the importance of living in a healthy environment and the value of protection of environment as part of their personal responsibilities.

Finally, the SPWSC calls on the United Nations Human Rights Council to provide more comprehensive information and more effective cooperation on air pollution with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and other members of the international community, so that there is more awareness raising and information sharing on air pollution.
