



General Assembly

Distr.: General
date

English only

Human Rights Council

Twenty-fourth session

Agenda item 3

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik, 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.

[22 August 2013]

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

Contemporary forms of slavery; The situation of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran has ratified “The Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery” in December 1959. Yet extreme economic inequality and poverty in addition with harmful traditional practices have prevented the country to eradicate the problem. Though there are no official and/or unofficial statistics covering the new forms of slavery in Iran, an increase in the number can be anticipated considering the raise in poverty, especially in the recent years. The Contemporary forms of slavery in Iran include slavery due to family debt (bonded labor), compulsory work, servitude and sexual exploitation of women and little girls, sex trade, forced marriage for women, polygamy, girls’ early marriage, traffic in women for prostitution, traffic in children for their organs, recruiting children to smuggle narcotics, underage military service (child soldiers) to be recruited in armed conflicts, unpaid labor, working in home-based workshops, working in workshops with less than 5 workers¹ and child servitude. The case is usually exacerbated by officials from government or military ranks or special mafia groups supporting the violation as well as by written and unwritten laws against women’s rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Prostitution

Economic poverty and extreme inequality make an increasing number of women sell their body, just to make both ends meet. Young girls are exported to other countries, especially to the Persian Gulf states, deluded to hope for a better life there. Some families sell their little girls to pimps as sex workers. Pimps and smugglers make a lot of money by offering them. The average age of prostitution has, according to existing statistics, descended drastically during the last 7 years, reaching below 20 from previous 28. The minimum is now around 13, indicating a sharp shift towards teenagers². Most of the girls who are trapped in prostitution or drug addiction are victims of domestic violence. There are no safe homes or consulting opportunities for these girls who have mostly fled their homes.

Sexual abuse of the Transgender

Some of the prostitutes in Iran are those who have altered their sex. In 1982 and following the supreme leader; Ruhollah Khomeini’s Fatwa, sex reassignment surgery became legal, but as according to Islamic Republic of Iran’s laws, homosexuality is a crime and punished by death sentence for gays, they are forced to change their sex. Many of them are not transgender and don’t need the surgery. According to the reports only 20 percent of those who undergo the surgery, are transgender and despite all social, physical and mental problems will be satisfied with their new lives after the irreversible aggressive treatment. Deprived of regular psychological consultation, legal support, experienced surgeons, financial aids, supporting NGO’s and deserving jobs, the

¹ Workshops with less than five workers have been exempt from all labour laws in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

<http://survey07.ituc-csi.org/getcountry.php?IDCountry=IRN&IDLang=EN>

² <http://www.shafaf.ir/fa/pages/?cid=13863>

members of this sex minority mostly have no other choice than offering their body. The final stage is but depression, addiction and even suicide. Sayeh was not the first and will not be the last to alter gender. She survived all the difficulties during her refuge-seeking period in Turkey only to finish in depression and disappointment in Canada, where she had been finally accepted as refugee.

She explained her situation as following:

“You may react differently in response to the pressures: You may choose to leave home and family. You have two choices; you have to sell yourself and sometimes get the worst: knifed, raped, AIDS, etc. Or you may make enough money for the operation by selling yourself. It is very difficult to live a double life. If you are a boy with a girl figure, you are certain to have problems with the police. If you wear women’s clothes, the problem with the police is still there. You will face problems getting an ID. You have problems with the society. You have no other choice than accepting the surgery. You need money and you do every filthy work to make it, and throw yourself under the knife, and only then you find whether you are a transgender or not!”³

Forced marriage to stop revenge (Blood Gift)

In some parts of Iran such as in Chaharmahal Bakhtiari, Fars, Khuzestan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad, Kurdistan and Lorestan feud among tribes and clans turns to murdering some of the parties involved. The cycle of revenge is stopped only if the guilty party offers a female from its clan as compensation for the loss of life at the heat of the feud. The female is usually chosen from among young girls by the elders and offered to the other party without her consent. She is sacrificed to stop further bloodshed. Thereon, she is usually married off to an elder member and treated as slave, with contempt and hatred sexually and physically abused and deprived of all rights. The practice is called “Blood Gift”. Since 2011, the regions where the practice originates applied to register it as a “national heritage” but women’s rights activists vehemently opposed the proposal as savage and against women’s human rights. Like many other ancient practices in wars and tribal feuds, they argued that women are sacrificed to settled men’s disputes and there is no glory to register the practice as a “national heritage”.

Polygamy and Sexual Slavery

Men in the Islamic Republic of Iran can marry four legal wives and they can temporary marry an unlimited number of wives for a period of time ranging from one hour to 99 years. In temporary marriages men have the exclusive right of breaking the commitment. The woman sexually serves the man for a small sum of money, with no right to alimony, heir or divorce. On the other hand if a married woman engages in an extramarital sex, she will be stoned to death according to law. The outcome of men’s polygamy is a feeling of insecurity and humility for women leading them in many cases to depression, suicide and self-burning, and/or murdering the husband or other wife.

Forced marriages

Forced marriages in Iran have various forms. The marriage of girl child who cannot decide over her marriage and is forced, by her parents, often the father, to marry a man, is one of these forms.

³ <http://pari-saa.blogfa.com/post-6.aspx>

According to law the minimum age of marriage without a court permission for girls is 13 lunar year. Another form of forced marriage is forced family marriage. In some parts of the country it is believed that cousins are to marry each other. There are many reports on girls being killed by their father, brother or uncle due to their disobedience to this tradition. In case of disobedience the male cousin preserves the right to kill the rebellious girl. In some cases the girl's brothers cooperate with the killer. Such case happened in Ahwaz (a city in southern Iran). A girl decided to marry a boy other than her cousin. Her brothers put her in fire at home. She was taken to hospital. The cousin believing that the girl belonged to him killed the girl in hospital with a knife. The girl's brother cooperated.⁴

Child Labor

In some villages five-year-old girls are sold to carpet manufacturers. Forced labor instead of going to school is often the cause of their untimely aging; symptoms include the deformation of backbone and fingers, and developing low vision in wet poorly lighted cellars. The famous hand woven Iranian carpet is a product of the little Azerbaijanis girls who grow up in front of carpet frame⁵. The Islamic labor law exempts workshops with less than 5 workers and although Iran has ratified the convention on the rights of the child in July 13, 1994, yet the authorities do nothing to stop child labor.

Children of labor are "low-cost-forces" and in most cases the employers ignore their experience and expertise and fire them as soon as they reach legal age. The working day of these children is also warningly long. Researches show that 44 percent of these children have a ten-hour working day.⁶

Situation of small and home-based workshops

Working in small workshops is not a new subject, yet in recent years the laws support the employers. Those working in such workshops are denied the elementary rights of insurance and retiring. They are recruited at low payments and long hours on difficult jobs. Women and children are mostly employed in these workplaces. There is evidence that gender gap in nutrition, education and health is more prevalent among low-income social classes. The lack of investment on girls as human resources prolongs poverty and slavery from one generation to other.

Recommendations

- Adopting and implementing legislation to criminalize women trafficking in any form and shape.
- Identifying the factors which contribute to the expansion of human trafficking and combating the roots of the problem.
- Abolition of discriminatory laws and government support of old-age traditions such as "Blood gift" which have no place in the modern society.

⁴ <http://sociology82.blogfa.com/post-154.aspx>

⁵ <http://parlag->

[uldaz.miyanali.com/10/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C_%D9%88_%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9](http://parlag-uldaz.miyanali.com/10/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C_%D9%88_%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9)

⁶ <http://www.dw.de/a-16814810>

- Adopting and implementing legislation based on the universal declaration of human rights to stop all forms of women and girls slavery at the national level.
