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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 Organisation pour la Communication en Afrique et de Promotion de la Cooperation Economique Internationale - OCAPROCE Internationale, 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.

[30 January 2024]

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



Child Trafficking by Armed Groups in North Africa

The trafficking of children by armed groups in North Africa, exemplified by instances involving the armed group of the Polisario Front, is a distressing violation of human rights that demands urgent attention.

The armed group of Polisario, has been implicated in cases where children have been subjected to trafficking for various purposes, including forced labor and recruitment into armed activities. This nefarious practice raises serious concerns about the well-being and safety of vulnerable children in the region.

Reports suggest that the armed group of Polisario has exploited the desperate circumstances of the Tindouf camps populations. Children, facing precarious living conditions, are susceptible to trafficking by armed groups seeking to bolster their ranks or exploit them for labor. The lack of proper oversight and accountability within the region allows such groups to operate with relative impunity.

The trafficking of children not only violates international law but also inflicts severe physical and psychological harm on the victims. Forced labor, child soldiering, and other forms of exploitation deny children their fundamental rights, including the right to education, health, and protection from violence. The global community must condemn these practices and work collaboratively to address the root causes that make children vulnerable to trafficking by armed groups.

The case of the Sahrawi girl F.L. is the best evidence of the true face of the armed group of Polisario, which exploits civilians, including children, to achieve its inhumane goals. Highlighting the situation involving F.L., a Sahrawi girl adopted by a Spanish family at the age of five, this recent occurrence unfolded during her visit to the Tindouf camps as part of the "Holidays in Peace" program. The armed group of Polisario orchestrated the abduction, instructing the biological parents to destroy the girl's travel documents, preventing her return to her adoptive family in Spain. In response to their daughter's disappearance, the Spanish adoptive family sought to aid her escape from the camps through an exfiltration operation. Unfortunately, the young girl was arrested by the Algerian police and was conducted to the Tindouf Camps by members of the armed group of polisario.

This incident is part of a series of abductions involving young Sahrawi girls adopted by Spanish families following their visits to the Tindouf camps. Instances of fundamental rights violations affecting young women, including N.B., E.H., M.M., and D.S., have been documented in the past. Diplomatic efforts at regional and international levels are essential to address the broader context that facilitates the trafficking of children by armed groups. The global community must engage in collaborative initiatives to dismantle the networks involved in these heinous practices and ensure a safer future for the vulnerable children caught in the crossfire of armed groups in North Africa.
