

A written information report on children's rights in Somalia

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Introduction:

The rights of the Somali child are a key focus of Misr El-Salam for Development and Human Rights Foundation, especially in light of the grave violations it witnesses over the past years, along with the ongoing condemnation by families and civil society organizations and the United Nations call for an immediate action to support childhood.

It is worth noting that during its previous universal periodic review mechanism in 2016, Somalia received 18 recommendations related to the rights of the child, which means that they must be taken into account and implemented on the ground. However, in reality, the Somali child is surrounded by various obstacles. In this regard, several steps and procedures must be implemented, such as promoting children education, fostering their talents and abilities, and fighting children recruitment and trafficking.

Misr El-Salam for Development and Human Rights reports that Somalia ranked highly in grave violations against children, including killing and maiming children, denial of humanitarian access, attacks on schools and hospitals, along with arbitrary arrests, detention and recruitment of children in armed conflicts. Furthermore, children continue to suffer from various forms of social discrimination, early marriage, Poor health services, circumcision, and lack of education. The above suffering is compounded by problems such as: Poverty, family dysfunction, conflicts, and the political, economic and social fracture, which are rampant in the country in the absence of a legal supportive framework that protects children and guarantee their rights. In this regard, the foundation addresses the following points:

First: the rights of refugee and internally displaced children:

Devastating wars, conflicts, and ongoing political and economic strife in Somalia not only affect the country but also jeopardizes children, the most vulnerable group of society, whose ultimate concerns limited to finding a job and getting money. They lost their childhood in the process. Under this situation, many children are deprived from their rights to birth registration and to a name due to parents not requesting birth certificates for their children, in addition to the absence of a policy or service for registering births, The total number of births registered in the country does not exceed 3%, despite UNICEF's support to implement a practical birth registration system. This is because children are completely deprived of official recognition, the right to nationality, and the right to receive other basic services.

Second: the rights of the child to be protected against violence:

In this regard, Misr El- Salam expresses its deep concern about the increasing rates of violence against children. Three out of every six Somali children are exposed to various forms of violence, and this percentage increased by 23% from 2017 to 2018.

Girls also suffer from various forms of sexual violence. In 2019 alone, over 100 cases of sexual offences against girls were reported, however, no strict measures were applied. This in addition to the outbreak of circumcision, which reached 98%, making it the highest rate in the world. This harmful practice, however being prohibited by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, continues to severely affect girls and claim their lives, as one out of ten girls die due to this phenomenon. The Somali government recently condemned the kidnapping and rape of two three- and four-year-old girls while returning home from school, an accident that is not the first of its kind.¹ But, condemnation alone is not enough, as long as the government is helpless and can't prevent impunity for perpetrators.

Third: the child's right to education and health:

Many children of both sexes suffer from lack of education, especially females, due to social norms and other factors, in addition to the lack of qualified educational staff, which contributes to the low educational level in the country. Moreover, Somalia has one of the world's lowest gross enrolment rates for primary school-aged children with only 30 percent children at primary education level, 40% out of them are females. It is reported that the education sector receives less than one per cent of humanitarian funding, which is significantly low percentage.²

As for children health services, infant mortality rate is very significant, with approximately 63 out of 1000 Somali infants die because of the low birth weight and lack of immunity due to the weakness of mothers and the lack of food for them or their children, and only about 9% of children benefit from breastfeeding. Also, 104 out of 1,000 Somali children under the age of five, die due to poor medical care and various diseases such as malaria, measles, respiratory infections, cholera, malnutrition and severe drought. The unexpected climate of Somali also contributes remarkably to this crisis by taking its toll on the food and crops^{3,4}

¹ الاعتداء الجنسي على الأطفال: غضب في الصومال بعد اغتصاب طفلتين في الثالثة والرابعة، 5 أبريل 2020. <https://bbc.in/2HyTb7X>

² Save the children, Children in Somalia face some of the highest rates of grave violations, 8 August 2019. <https://bit.ly/3kUKpzx>

³ التحديات الصحية للأطفال الأفارقة على مائدة النقاش في منتدى الطفل الأفريقي، 20 ديسمبر 2019. <https://bit.ly/30f8A3U>

⁴ Realizing Children's Rights in Somalia. <https://bit.ly/33a809z>

Fourth: the child's right to food:

The ongoing severe floods and pervasive drought in Somalia triggered the displacement of about 203,000 people in 2019 with a total of 2.6 million internally displaced people. Somalia's re-occurring climate related emergencies result in devastating impact on communities who heavily rely on farming and livestock for their livelihood. About 2.1 million Somali citizens and children suffer from acute shortage of necessary food, in addition to children's lack of a clean and sustainable source of water except for rain in specific areas.⁵

Famine, which is increasing over time, also poses a major threat to Somali children. Over one million Somali children face malnutrition and drought, as 73% of children in Somalia consume less than two meals per day with a continuous decline in the amount of food available to them. About 1.2 million children under the age of five suffered from acute malnutrition in 2019.⁶

Fifth: Preventing child recruitment:

The most dangerous of all is the recruitment of children in armed conflicts and violent acts. In 2018, Somalia recorded the highest level in the world in terms of the armed use of children. Children under nine years are recruited into the Somali armed forces and other militias. Parents, on their part, send their children to Refugee camps on the border to escape the recruitment and to protect them from an unknown fate. This situation continued until 2019. Children are being abducted and used in collecting intelligence information and carrying out suicide attacks while young girls are recruited to serve as wives. Child recruitment in Somalia is alarmingly increasing and immediate actions must be taken to address it.⁷

Organizations estimate the number of children joining armed groups by 2000 to 3000 children, which results in the killing of more than 750 citizens and the demolition and destruction of many schools, hospitals and homes. During the recent events that took place in Libya, nearly 2,000 Somalis were reportedly joined the new forces heading towards fighting in Libya with an agency from Qatar and Turkey, in order to fight Khalifa Haftar's forces and also obtain military training on Qatari lands in exchange for giving them a living salary. Unquestionably, poverty and unemployment prevalent in the country have contributed remarkably to the joining of such groups. In light of demands

⁵ اليونيسف: ارتفاع عدد الأطفال الصوماليين الذين يعانون من سوء التغذية الحاد بمقدار 50%، 2 مايو <https://bit.ly/349PRrJ> 2017.

⁶ عائد عميرة، أطفال الصومال وخطر المجاعة المتواصل برعاية دولية، 25 مايو <https://bit.ly/2S6tzRZ> 2019.

⁷ صهيب عبد الرحمن، تجنيد الأطفال في الصومال ظاهرة مقلقة.. أي مصير ينتظرهم؟، 30 مارس <https://bit.ly/2G7gKED> 2019.

by parents to see their children, all means of establishing children's rights and achieving the aspired goals of preserving peace are destroyed^{8,9}

Sixth: Child Labor Prevention:

Dire poverty, compounded with lack of education and spread of wars and natural disasters in Somali society has catastrophically increased the rate of child labor. Children, between 5 and 14 year, are forced to work so that they could earn their livings and support their families. Working children in Somalia are estimated by 39.8%, nearly one million children. They work in the construction sector, agriculture, logging, livestock, mining, begging and domestic service. They are also exposed to trafficking, recruitment, or involvement in illegal and armed activities. Some humanitarian aid is provided to about a third of the country's population by various organizations and actors, but there are about 2 million people in urgent need of this humanitarian aid, but they are inaccessible due to the control of armed militias, such as the Al-Shabab movement, over these areas, where no humanitarian organizations exist at all. Amidst bloody wars and ongoing conflicts, innocent children are getting robbed of their childhood^{10,11}

Recommendations:

1. Ratifying the optional protocols annexed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. Ensuring the access of necessary aid to secure the lives of children, through establishing a sector that connects humanitarian organizations and various families in poor areas, and conducts periodic vaccinations for them.
3. Providing free basic education for children, especially females, while improving the quality of education through studied ministerial decisions. And building more schools to encourage children enrollment in education.
4. Preventing children recruitment in armed or illegal conflicts, through the application of deterrent penalties such as imprisonment and financial fines for perpetrators of these acts.
5. Providing the necessary health services to take care of children and protect their future, by building hospitals and conducting comprehensive periodic checks for the child, while determining the cost of the medicines.
6. Granting the child the freedom to report violence, through establishing a fund to receive complaints from children in schools, villages and elsewhere, and trying to

⁸ أحمد هاشم، صومالي جارديان: قطر وتركيا جندتا 5 آلاف صومالي كمرتزقة في ليبيا، 24 يوليو <https://bit.ly/3cDnqGo> 2020.

⁹ أيانلي عبدي، أعيذوا أبناءنا.. جيش الصومال تاكله نيران ليبيا بـ"وقود" قطري تركي، 28 يوليو <https://bit.ly/34ateDm> 2020.

¹⁰ د. سالي محمد فريد، عمالة الأطفال في أفريقيا.. الأبعاد والآثار الاقتصادية ودور المنظمات الإقليمية والدولية، 15 فبراير 2020.

<https://bit.ly/3l7KYGD>

¹¹ هذه الدول لاتزال تعاني من عمالة الأطفال، 20 مارس <https://bit.ly/2Hunk8r> 2018.

deal with them according to the difficulty level of the problem, and the continuous communication with child rights organizations to receive support.

7. Addressing violence against children, and prosecuting violators of the rights of the child by torture, killing, recruitment, or attaching the child to the armed forces and others, with strict and specific laws as the establishment of a specific academic to accommodate displaced and victimized children.
8. Reducing the penalties against minor children, by abolishing the death penalty and the unconditional release of politically detained children.
9. Implementing programs for the reintegration and social rehabilitation of children, and keeping them completely away from armed military recruitment.