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TOPIC A:

“Afghan Children Recruited
to Fight in Syria”

NC
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“A lot of child soldiers lose their minds.”

-Emmanuel Jal

Nieves Padilla Rabell
Undersecretary of UNICEF

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Topic A:

Afghan Children Recruited to Fight in Syria

UNICEF'S mandate expanded to help children whose lives were at risk in developing countries, it works in 190 countries and territories to protect the rights of every child. UNICEF has spent 70 years working to improve the lives of children and their families. Defending children's rights throughout their lives requires a global presence, aiming to produce results and understand their effects.

Since 2011, the Syrian Arab Republic has been on a civil conflict between the loyalist forces of Bashar al-Assad, the president of Syria and rebel and terror groups aiming to destabilize the region. The conflict has been a scenario of atrocities like crimes against humanity, war crimes, and a potential genocide.

Countries like Russia, Iraq, Venezuela and Iran are strong allies of the Syrian regime and the latter is providing both military and logistic support.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is home of 2.5 million Afghans refugees, fleeing the violence and poverty of their home country.

Afghan refugees are treated as second-class citizens and they are discriminated on a daily basis, the face scrutiny by the Iranian government. They don't have a legal status within Iran and therefore are vulnerable to systematic human rights violations.

Vulnerable Afghan refugees have been prime targets for the Iranian government looking for military manpower in its

alliance with Assad, as years of fighting have taken a toll on Iran's own paramilitary units, like the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-controlled Basij militia. Although Assad's Ba'athist government is nominally secular, Iran has used its self-image as the main representative of Shia Muslims worldwide to frame the conflict as a religious war against Sunni extremists. Many Afghans in Iran are Shia Hazara, a minority group in Afghanistan, and thousands of them have been sent to fight with other Shia fighters from Iraq or Pakistan. Other Afghans were drawn to sign up by the promise of a few hundred dollars a month or obtaining legal immigration status in Iran.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has recruited Afghan immigrant children living in Iran to fight in Syria.

Human Rights Watch said a review photo of tombstones in Iranian cemeteries identified eight Afghan children who apparently fought and died in Syria. Family members of two reported cases of deceased fighters under the age of 18 said that their children fake their ages to join to the Fatemiyoun division.

The recruitment of children under 15 is a war crime, military recruits must be at least 18 years old according to the international law.

Children of the age of 14 are being recruited to fight in the Fatemiyoun division, an exclusively armed Afghan unit.

Point to address:

- Iran should immediately end the recruitment of child

soldiers and bring back any Afghan children it has sent to fight in Syria

- Iran should immediately ratify the Optional Protocol and ensure that Afghan children are not being recruited to fight in Syria
- Iran should be improving protections for Afghan refugee children, not leaving them vulnerable to unscrupulous recruiting agents.

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