



United Nations Human Rights Council: 31st Session (29 February – 24 March 2016)

Item 4 General Debate

Tuesday 15 March 2016

Speaker: BHA representative, Cordelia Tucker O'Sullivan

Thank you, Mr President.

The number of people who have fled Syria is 'the biggest refugee population from a single conflict in a generation'.¹ It is estimated that around 4.8 million people have left,² and millions more are internally displaced. 'Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution',³ yet the number of asylum applications granted globally falls far short of the demand for places.

These refugees, including millions of children,⁴ have fled the indiscriminate attacks by Government forces on civilian residential areas; they have fled IS controlled zones, where IS enforce their strict interpretation of Islamic law, carrying out frequent public executions, including of those accused of 'apostasy, adultery...or because of their real or perceived sexual orientation'.⁵

Yet those who survive the dangerous journey to Europe, with the hope that they will be greeted as human beings worthy of dignity and respect, are instead at times being met with attacks from far-right activists,⁶ alongside the rise of populist politics⁷ and xenophobia. There are an estimated 26,000 unaccompanied children in Europe alone, who are vulnerable to trafficking, prostitution, and child labour.⁸

Until such a time that refugees and the displaced can return safely, and efforts for the promotion of human development in the region can be undertaken, it must be remembered that refugees are first and foremost human beings, and hence worthy of all the protections guaranteed under international law.

We fully support the eight key actions for the protection of refugees⁹ put forward by Amnesty International during the 30th regular session of this Council, and we urge the Council to pressure all relevant States to live up to their duties under the UN Convention on Refugees,¹⁰ in particular its core principle of responsibility and burden sharing.

Thank you.

¹ According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees: <http://www.unhcr.org/559d648a9.html>

² <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php>

³ Article 14, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

⁴ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php>

⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/syria/report-syria/>

⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/far-right-activists-impersonated-police-to-attack-refugees-for-money-and-mobile-phones-in-calais-a6927711.html>

⁷ For example in Germany: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/12/angela-merkel-elections-refugee-crisis-far-right>

⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/27/syrian-refugee-children-to-be-made-welcome-in-uk>

⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior40/2447/2015/en/>

¹⁰ UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951).