



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 10

### Technical assistance and capacity-building

## Written statement\* submitted by Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 January 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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## Social Networking and Natural Disasters

Every year, many people in the world lose their lives due to natural disasters and affected people and survivors of these disasters face many long-term problems. In addition to the significant effect of being prepared for the crisis and preparing the necessary foundations to build societies that can survive disasters, proper rescue activities could help reduce the pain of the affected people and result in their mental recovery and spiritual rehabilitation. Therefore, it is important that countries share their experiences regarding these activities.

According to the statistics and due its geological condition, the Islamic Republic of Iran is considered to be one of the high-risk earthquake zones in the world. In recent years, as a result of three devastating earthquakes including Bam earthquake in 2003, Ahar- Varzaghan earthquake in 2012, and Kermanshah earthquake in 2017, tens of thousands of people have been killed and injured, and hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to struggle with broad range of financial and social problems. According to its objective to achieve a world built on justice and peace and by paying special attention to vulnerable people particularly children, Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society (IAPSRS) has been assisting affected people with relief and social programs.

With the goal of fulfilling the basic needs and reducing the pain of the affected people, IAPSRS provides mental support for these people and tries to empower them when natural disasters happen. The experience of past rescue activities and current activities of the Society in marginalized suburbs demonstrate that maintaining social structures and supporting local solidarity play significant roles in restoring the normal condition. In these situations, children and women who are among the most vulnerable groups in the society, face more complex problems and conditions. This fact, highlights the need for an organized field work in the affected areas more than ever. Notwithstanding the rescue activities for fulfilment of basic needs which take place in the affected areas when required and are based on identification and distribution principles, the general policy of IAPSRS is to provide a foundation for rehabilitation and empowerment through capacity building and creating local and native networks. Twenty years of relief and social activities have shown that such activities should never contradict human dignity and cause trouble for the inner efforts of human beings. Therefore, the short-term guideline of IAPSRS in rescuing affected people includes initial and precise identification of needs and defining specialized activities. These short-term activities continue in the form of capacity building for medium-term and long periods of time.

Among the main challenges of crisis management after earthquakes are difficulties in accessing some of the affected areas, cultural differences and racial discriminations which could lead to unfair distribution of the goods and services. According to the objective of the Society -which is inspired by Imam Ali's manner in helping minorities- after Kermanshah earthquake, this NGO provided rescue services mainly in areas that were underrepresented due the above reasons and had difficulties in fulfilling their basic needs.

Because of the vast social networks of the Society across the country, rescuers and specialist working groups of the Society are always among the first responders to natural disasters. In 2017 earthquake of Kermanshah, some local members of the Society in that province were the first volunteers who appeared there and evaluated the intensity of the disaster, the damages and the immediate needs of people. Because of the history of the activities of members in this province, a communication network was quickly formed between provincial authorities and reliable people in different cities. This network spread from cities to counties and villages and created a group of local experts and reliable people in the affected areas. This communicational chain facilitated, in short term, the process of identification of immediate needs which requires precise identification and presence in the areas. This was because these experts were well aware of the social and cultural habits of the local inhabitants. The chain also helped to ensure fair distribution of donations. Throughout the whole process of crisis management and providing services to affected people, a community-based approach was applied to encourage participation of local volunteers. This approach enabled local residents to be in charge and prevented dependency on outside assistance, which resulted in decreasing demand for volunteers from other regions. Currently, most of the job-creating activities for women and educational activities for children are being handled by local residents. The local members of the Society are attempting to set up an educational

centre for children and empowering women to facilitate mental recovery and spiritual rehabilitation after the earthquake.

IAPSRs believes that establishing local networks must be accomplished before natural disasters happen. It should be noted that the dynamic and consistent nature of these networks are the two important components that ensure effectiveness and sustainability of these networks. Based on this approach, provincial agents of the Society are attempting to spread their links to smaller towns and villages to identify the local influencers in each region to prepare them for community-based management of possible future crises.

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