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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 Sikh Human Rights Group, 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.

[5 February 2023]

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



Need For Greater Support For Neurodiversity Within The Disability Spectrum

During the United Nations Human Rights Council's 48th Regular Session, and as evidenced in United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report entitled A/HRC/51/11, the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Ms Tlaleng Mofokeng, stressed that millions had lived in crisis long before the pandemic and that, globally, millions were disadvantaged by an uneven playing field. The root causes of such include persons with disabilities amongst various other disempowered and marginalised communities.

The Special Rapporteur went on to stress that the eventual impact of COVID-19 had clearly been determined not by biological factors but by structural and socioeconomic inequalities within and between countries, systemic racism, and discrimination. The Special Rapporteur then added that the impact of the pandemic had also been determined by [inadequate] public health policies, a lack of transparency, and problems of leadership. In Sikh Human Rights Group's opinion precisely the same can be said about the manner and form in which many Governments approach neurodiversity.

Neurodiversity is a form of disability. However, with some greater awareness and some assistance, children on the neurodiversity spectrum can grow up into successful adults who are well-integrated into society.

Yet it remains a neglected area of disability. It seems that because neurodiversity is not obvious as a physical disability, little attention is paid to those who are disadvantaged or denied opportunities by virtue of being on the neurodiverse spectrum. Autism is a prevalent form of neurodiversity. Ignoring it affects the children and adults who possess it and deprives them of opportunities that they can easily avail to improve their lives and that of the State.

For instance, in 2021, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's Office for National Statistics found that those with severe or specific learning difficulties, autism, and mental illnesses or other nervous disorders were least likely to be in work than any other disabled group.

The Sikh Human Rights Group and our affiliates that this can be addressed by implementing support services, raising awareness within institutions and within communities and enabling children and adults on the autism spectrum to engage comfortably with challenging environments. It helps a great deal to set up programmes for successful integration of children with autism within their communities.

In November 2020, the Sikh Human Rights Group established its ongoing disability project entitled the Sikh Neurodiversity Network. This amongst various other matters:

- (1) Hosts Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (hereafter referred to as SEND) engagement events at religious and community institutions in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for neurodiverse children and adults and those who are close or care for them. The objective is to listen to the aforementioned parties' concerns and to upskill the concerned organisation on what they could be doing to make their buildings and programmes more welcoming and nurturing environments for neurodiverse children and adults.
- (2) We also run medical practitioner-led SEND training days for those in positions of authority within their religious or community institutions.
- (3) We run neurotypical and neurodiverse youth engagement events. This forges genuine and subsisting relationships between neurotypical and neurodiverse youth.
- (4) Information leaflets and videos for parents and nonprofessional carers.
 - (i) Advice on how best to safeguard their child or themselves against negative interactions with the police or the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

- (ii) Advice for police and other institutions on behaviours or personal characteristics that might indicate neurodivergent characters and best practice suggestions.
- (iii) Producing training programmes, literature and videos to enhance employment opportunities. Both for those with neurodivergent conditions and employers alike.

We have found that both the parents and carers and the children that we are currently working with are benefitting enormously from this. The children are engaging with the community. The community institutions that we are working with, are taking steps to be sensitive to the character of the children who are on the neurodiversity spectrum. In other words, the parents feel that they can look forward to a better future for their child.

The project has shown that increasing awareness in the community, within authorities and within state institutions improves the prospects of neurodivergent children and young adults. Communities feel more comfortable and are helpful after understanding the issue.

We suggest the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities should make neurodiversity an important issue and persuade Member States to adopt programmes and make commitments to raise general and specific awareness around this issue, set up support systems, encourage employers to understand neurodiversity and state authorities such as law enforcement agencies to be sensitive to the character of children and adults with neurodivergent conditions.

We recommend that a specialist team could be set up to offer assistance to countries as part of their improving technical skills mandate.

This is a disability that needs fewer resources to address but with enormous potential for the individual concerned, for the community and the State.

This of course falls under not only the United Nations Human Rights Councils obligation to ensure technical cooperation, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities mandate to develop a regular dialogue with States and other stakeholders for the identification, exchange and promotion of good practices related to the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities and their participation as equal members of society but also Member States National Development Objectives and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals aims and objectives.

There are many examples of extremely successful people on the neurodiversity spectrum who have added to the knowledge, wealth and general social fabric of society.

Therefore, what we are seeking from the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and other relevant stakeholders is as follows:

- (1) For the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and all other relevant stakeholders to persuade Member State Governments to further focus their attention on offering wider and more comprehensive support to families who are currently seeking a diagnosis.
- (2) Enhance the support systems for those who have obtained a diagnoses and the establishment and maintenance of a central neurodiversity support resources hub.
- (3) A focus on educational systems so that families can draft, implement and uphold their education, health and care plans and neurotypical youth can have better understanding of the challenges and difficulties faced by their neurodiverse peers.
- (4) Employment and vocational skills training opportunities to be enhanced for neurodiverse individuals.

The Sikh Human Rights Group and its affiliate organisations would be delighted to assist the United Nations Human Rights Council. the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and other relevant stakeholders in developing this further.