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**General debate on national experience in population matters:
“Strengthening the demographic evidence base for the post-2015
Development agenda”**

Statement submitted by Manhattan Multicultural Counseling, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ E/CN.9/2016/1.

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Youth engagement in strengthening the demographic evidence base for the post-2015 development agenda

Manhattan Multicultural Counseling, Inc. (MMC) is a grassroots organization that focuses on youth to foster tolerance, encourage diversity and improve human rights. The mission of our organization is to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by developing multicultural competency and embracing a culture of peace among adolescents in all societies. Our mission is inspired by the Edict of Cyrus the Great, Founder of the Persian Empire who brought harmony to the multicultural society of his time in 539 B.C. Our organization is endeavouring in the twenty-first century to follow his footsteps to promote human rights for all.

The aims of our organization are as follows:

- I. The creation of a safe environment for first-hand engagement between teens from a wide variety of cultures, faiths and ethnicities. This will lead to both a greater appreciation for differences and contribute to reduction of intercultural tensions.
- II. Through exposure to the work of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and other intergovernmental bodies and discussions on other international issues, such as the Millennium Development Goals, (MDG) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, students will not only become more globally minded, but they will be empowered to become leaders in their own communities to enact positive change.
- III. A multicultural perspective is essential for the promotion of peace, tolerance, and harmony in the world. In the youth program, the UDHR serves as a guiding document. Our students are encouraged to learn and memorize the 30 articles of UDHR in order to foster tolerance and mutual understanding in our times. This also underpins Cyrus the Great's philosophy of living in a harmonious multicultural society.

MMC believes that society as a whole should start allowing the youth in our communities, first by educating as well as raising awareness of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) in order to prepare them for their responsibilities for taking positive action. Once integrated, youth become a powerful force within the population. Through our educational programmes, youth can learn what our basic human rights are from an early age, helping them to develop further respect for a multicultural scale. These skills can be seen on an international level but, should be encouraged into the local level.

Manhattan Multicultural Counseling Inc. provides a safe space for participants who are from a range of ethnic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds and who often do not have the opportunity for interfaith or intercultural dialogue in their school or at home. Over the past ten years, our programme has had a diverse group of students from many different countries: Afghanistan, Algeria, France, Italy, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, and Madagascar.

Every year MMC has witnessed among youth the tension, discrimination, hate speech, prejudice, xenophobia, lack of self-esteem as well as self-worth. According to United States Department of Justice (June, 2011), 31 per cent of violent offenders

in hate crimes had been motivated by race or religion and were under 18 years of age. To address this issue and the challenges found within the fabric of an increasingly multicultural city, the goals of the MMC are to improve lives of youth through teaching imitative of the SDGs. In addition, with more than 56 per cent of New York City's population described as either foreign or a first generation immigrant (Bloomberg, 2013), today more than ever, it is critical that youth learn more about SDGs and develop mutual respect and intercultural appreciation so that they can step up to become outstanding leaders in this increasingly complex society.

In 2011, the International Year of Youth, MMC held an event titled "Youth Interfaith Dialogue and Mutual Understanding," which took place at UNICEF in New York. The panel consisted of four youth who were once students of the Manhattan Multicultural Summer Youth Program. These students spoke on the theme of the event from four different religious perspectives (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism). Also, in 2014, on the occasion of the International Year of Youth, MMC collaborated with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) on a mental health campaign.

In 2013, MMC, in celebration of its ten- year anniversary, organized an event at St. Francis of Assisi Church, "Religious Tolerance in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: A Discussion of Human Rights and Religious Freedom". This event coincided with the arrival of the Cyrus Cylinder's first visit to NYC.

For the forty-ninth session of the Commission on Population and Development our suggestions as follows:

- * Encourage elementary and high school level youth engagement
- * Increase participation of youth in working with governments, the United Nations systems, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sectors with a focus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- * Develop and support research to educate young potential leaders of tomorrow
- * Enhance more educational programmes, e.g. to teach human rights, tolerance, diversity, raise awareness of SDG issues among youth,
- * Involve media, traditional and non-traditional, as a SDG tool to reach our youth

In the past ten years, Manhattan Multicultural Counseling successfully has been able to address some of the issues related to youth in New York City by teaching them to become effective advocates for change and citizens of the world. In order to strengthen the demographic evidence for post-2015 development agenda, youth should be at the forefront. Youth can be exemplary of how they learned by working with others in their communities and developing a multicultural perspective is essential for the promotion of peace, tolerance and harmony in the world.