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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

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consultative status**

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

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The violation of human rights through addictions

Human rights are not simply an esoteric inquiry into the soul of human existence, but rather a modestly discernable set of principles. Specifically, a violation of these rights inflicts real social injustice that degrades the dignity of the being. The devaluing of human dignity can manifest itself in a multitude of ways and is important in every form it takes. Living in a rapidly evolving society, it is imperative to acknowledge that this dynamic has also changed, parallel to the evolution of society's value system. The definitions of human rights have both expanded in their scope and application. This statement will examine one area where the definition of human rights should be expanded, *i.e.* addictions to controlled substances and alcohol, the justifications for such an expansion and recommendations for action to be taken.

I. Expanding Definitions of Rights: Addictions as a Violation of Rights

Mindful of the evolving forms through which human rights are obstructed, BAPS believes it important to draw attention of the Council to the violation of human rights in the form of addictions to a variety of intoxicating and addictive substances; in particular controlled substances, tobacco, and alcohol. A growing concern, this problem is truly a global one: affecting nearly every demographic across national or regional boundaries and ethnic or racial differences. Addiction influences people from diverse backgrounds and empirical evidence has shown its crippling effects. In addition to dooming people to poor health and living conditions, it adds fuel to the flames of poverty and flavor to the culture of crime, gang and domestic violence. Causing extreme levels of dependence, addictive substances not only eat away at human dignity, but enslave the human psyche, often preempting addicts into believing their sustenance is linked to their substance of abuse. Indeed, though the impact of addictions on human rights crosses a host of boundaries, it is clear that addictions affect the poorer and more uneducated segments of society more; adding to the violation of their dignity.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."¹ However, addictions force its victims to forfeit that dignity and the rights that guarantee it through the loss of self-value, health and freedom. Many addicts originally turn to their substance of abuse as a means of escaping some harsh reality. This perceived escape only leads to a further degradation of rights, fueling a vicious cycle. The repercussions of this stretch beyond the individual, though it is the primary place of impact, and permeate into society through the family unit, workplace or school. Human beings are no longer "free" under the effect of these addictive substances. As mentioned to earlier, these addictive substances cause a dependence that enslaves the addicts behind bars, not of metal, but of the mind.

Moreover, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every human being is entitled to "the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family."² The evidence is clear: addiction to tobacco, alcohol, and drugs

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217A U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., 1st plen. mtg., U.N. Doc. A/810 (Dec. 12, 1948).

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *supra* note 1, art. 25

pose a serious medical threat to one's health and well-being. Because the medical dangers of addiction are so well-documented and are clearly linked as threats to basic human rights, it would be, at present, dilatory to delve deeper into the matter.

Furthermore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."³ Addictions serve as shackles, tying up an individual's potential and freedom. Not only are addicts strained mentally, but physically, an addict forfeits good health and reaches a point after which the body is no longer accustomed to long periods of time without the intake of an addictive substance. While critics may suggest that attempts to dissuade the use of addictive substances is contrary to "free will", it becomes necessary to clearly define the parameters of our intent: we are seeking to spread knowledge about the pejorative effects of these addictive substances; to this day, there exists a great deal of ignorance about the intensity of the problems posed by these substances. Therefore, BAPS believes that the initial goal is to begin to affirm human dignity by educating the individual about her rights, thus allowing her to make effective and informed decisions. By beginning towards this end, we can reach the ultimate goal of freedom from the slavery of addictions.

II. Societal Justifications for the Expansion of Human Rights Norms to Address Addictions

The social ramifications of addictions are widespread and well-documented. Among the most regrettable consequences is the emergence of an "addict culture", particularly among the youth. Teens who become active addicts are often involved in crimes and gangs. Logically, it only makes sense. For these teens, a source of money is necessary to purchase more addictive substances of their choice. The average individual with a drug addiction has to steal an average of \$1,000.00 worth of property and goods to raise the \$200.00 necessary to preserve their cycle of addiction. In general, people who are addicts, as alluded to earlier, often suffer from issues that prevent clear and logical thinking. For instance, 70% of violent crime is committed by people who are intoxicated with either alcohol or drugs, and, in fact, approximately 80% of all crime in the U.S. is related to drug or alcohol addiction. Every year, approximately 135,000 people die as a consequence to their addiction to alcohol and drugs, costing over \$46 billion dollars.⁴

The byproducts of addictions have had deep repercussions, particularly on the women in the households of men with addictions. These repercussions are two-fold: first, the presence of addictive substances is closely intertwined with the physical abuse of women in the household. In fact, rates of domestic violence were almost 15 times higher in households where husbands were described as often drunk as opposed to never drunk.⁵ While the problems of addiction and domestic violence are independent of one another, they certainly interact with one another. Moreover, the financial strain, mentioned above, has a direct impact on the females of a household. As men continually throw away money on addictive substances, the socio-economic problems grow for the family, minimizing the scope of

³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *supra* note 1, art. 4

⁴ Narconon Drug Addiction Facts, available at <http://www.drugaddictiontreatment.info/drug-addiction-facts.htm>

⁵ Miller, Brenda A. and Downs, William R. "The Impact of Family Violence on the Use of Alcohol by Women," *Alcohol Health and Research World*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 137-143, 1993.

opportunities available for women. With little opportunity for growth and development, women are trapped in cult of domesticity.

III. Recommendations and Action

BAPS believes that the recognition of the problem would, in and of itself, be the first step for this council to take. Recognition of the problem would be denoted, for example, by adding this issue to the agenda for the council. In retrospect, however, the statistics and problems presented are extremely pressing and the context in which they have been presented has not even scratched the surface of the issue. As this council possesses a global reach and ability to amalgamate resources from governments and non-governmental organizations across borders, BAPS calls upon this council to take this issue and create protocols for involvement; many NGOs can be encouraged through the Human Rights Council to run anti-addiction campaigns. While the expectations may seem lofty, the potential product is indeed feasible and worth endeavoring for.

BAPS has a long-standing track record in the affirmation of human rights through its fight against dehumanizing addictions. Motivated by books, pamphlets, exhibitions, personal letters and counseling, countless people have affirmed their dignity and that of society by giving up addictions. Over 6 million people, across several countries have visited BAPS' traveling exhibitions. During the past year, from May 1st to 20th 2007, 28,000 BAPS youth volunteers throughout India participated in a special de-addiction campaign. BAPS has focused its efforts on the poorest and most socially repressed segments of society—segments that have been most ravaged by the scourge of addictions. BAPS has observed through first-hand experience that addictions to drugs and alcohol are a primary factor in poverty as well as a key factor in child abuse, child labor, rape, spousal abuse, and other forms of violence against the individual. BAPS requests the Human Rights Council to consider this serious issue and calls upon the Council to declare that addictions are indeed a human rights issue in need of remedial action.

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