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Statement submitted by ISHA Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2011/100 and Corr.1.

Statement*

According to the Government of India, over 70 per cent of 3rd grade students in the southern state of Tamil Nadu cannot read at 1st grade level; and only 35 per cent of children in the 4th grade can recognize numbers from 11 to 99. Teacher absenteeism rates remain on the rise, at 36.6 per cent compared to 26.3 per cent in 2007 (Annual Status of Education Report, 2010).

Five years ago, the organization began transforming the lives of rural children across Tamil Nadu, India, by introducing a model of affordable, high-quality education where it is otherwise unavailable. Our strategy calls for establishing one village-based school in each of Tamil Nadu's 207 subdistricts. The organization already welcomes 2,745 children (45 per cent female) among our seven matriculation schools in economically disadvantaged rural areas. Learning spans pre-kindergarten through 6th grade (with plans to reach the 12th grade by 2016). It also promotes confident, English-speaking, computer-adept youth on par with students from the best urban schools.

The organization mainstreams children from the most disadvantaged castes (tribal communities), enabling them to share classrooms with children of other castes, creeds and socio-economic backgrounds. The various limitations of the tribal setting compel the organization's teachers to go beyond their regular duties to guide students through simple hygiene practices and social skills. A testimony to the organization's ongoing success is the over 95 per cent daily attendance by students, compared with the national average of 73.5 per cent (Annual Status of Education Report, 2010).

Most students rely on the school not only for academics, but also for education about the world outside of their village. Through interactive programmes and computer classes, libraries and laboratories, sports and field trips, the scalable and replicable model directly supports the achievement of Goals 2 and 3 of the Millennium Development Goals. Over 60 per cent of the organization's students are, for all practical purposes, first-generation school-goers in their families and nearly half of them girls.

A step is urgently needed to examine the organization's achievements and define the key aspects that distinguish viable public/private education models among similar work in India and across the globe. This should be done through an expert panel comprised of dynamic educators and economists who:

- Assess the relevance of the organization's work in underserved communities in Tamil Nadu
- Recognize the impact of this work on communities from selected locations
- Engage the central and state governments to support school infrastructure, legislate to permit and encourage public-private partnerships
- Recommend measures and identify resources for the immediate scaling-up and rapid proliferation of such initiatives around the globe.

The leadership of the Economic and Social Council in this direction would be an important catalyst for necessary international cooperation among public, private, civil society sectors to achieve the Goals without delay.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.