



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the  
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority  
theme: rethinking and strengthening social development in the  
contemporary world**

### **Statement submitted by Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society, 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 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

### Supporting role of students and universities in social development

The present statement speaks about the participation of university students in social development through the activities of non-governmental organizations, looking at the successful experiences of the Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society.

Poverty, especially in developing countries, is strongly linked to cultural and educational problems. In other words, poverty is not just the fact of having no money, but also the lack of literacy, life skills or appropriate behaviour, especially towards children, and of many other forms of knowledge. These are the causes and effects of the cycle of poverty. No one can therefore be successful in reducing poverty, not even by giving a large amount of money directly to poor people, without tackling cultural issues.

College can be an ideal time for carrying out social activities. University students have many of the qualities needed for getting involved in social issues, such as poverty eradication. They have the ability to educate poor children and to become role models for them, changing their lifestyle and being generally effective in dispelling the images perpetuated by the culture of poverty. The most important skill an organization should have is to manage human resources in a good manner.

The Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society was established in 1999 by three students of Sharif University of Technology, one of the best engineering schools. Since then, thousands of students from different universities all over the country have been working as volunteers in many projects and plans to combat poverty.

This innovative idea has led to many remarkable achievements in the area of poverty eradication and is recommended as an inspirational model for similar student groups. Creating networks in universities, maintaining the integrity of the system, establishing proper written procedures and training students correctly are some important topics of concern.

The approach adopted by the Society can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Recognizing poor families, especially in poor areas and slums;
- (b) Creating a centre for deploying volunteers and scheduling projects;
- (c) Evaluating feedback and improving workplans.

Projects include educating children who have dropped out of school, providing training in life skills, empowering women, offering health consultations and providing school consultancy services and art and sport activities to distressed children, in parallel to some financial support for their families.

The outstanding benefits of this approach include:

- Familiarizing scholars with poverty issues and social problems;
- Planning activities for university students in their spare time;
- Spreading these ideas through students who spend part of their studies in various universities and cities;

- Creating a social network against poverty in different cities, and even different countries, and involving people in contact with students, such as their families and professors, in poverty issues and fundraising;
- Most of all, ensuring that human resources, as opposed to financial resources, play an effective role.

When functioning well, this kind of approach has the potential to become a type of social movement against hunger, illiteracy, violence and human rights violations.

Under special circumstances, such as war, disasters and international sanctions, an organization such as ours can prevent much hardship from befalling civilians, especially children. Owing to their student base, neutrality and good reputation within and outside the country, our kind of non-governmental organization can be a strong bridge between international civil society and the civilian beneficiaries of its humanitarian activities, especially poor people, who suffer most from sanctions.

Involving the intellectual members of society in poverty eradication will increase the probability of developing innovative projects and ideas and will establish a link between creative, idealist thinking and pragmatism.

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