



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
21 November 2014

Original: English

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### Commission for Social Development

#### Fifty-third session

4-13 February 2015

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**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 Fédération européenne des centres de recherche et d'information sur le sectarisme, a non-governmental organization in special 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.

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\* E/CN.5/2015/1.



## Statement

### **Re-evaluating and strengthening social systems for moving cult victims out of poverty and growing inequality towards social freedom and protection in open democratic and free societies for the twenty-first century**

The Federation has observed over the decades how cult victims and their families suffer from being denied the benefits of social developments from the outside world. The related mainstream government institutions have plans for systems through which to provide services and protections, where appropriate.

Most people who are not members of a sect or a cult are not aware of the reality that cult members inhabit in closed communities designed to keep group rules and policies hidden from mainstream societal institutions for public inspection or accountability. Normal societal privacy laws are designed to protect the individual, and such legal privacy should be protected, but many cult organizations withhold reliable information about individual and civil rights from those individuals who need it, unfortunately.

The Federation has observed that when one considers the true causes of poverty in the context of cult organizations one enters a world in which the testimony of former members is striking and very consistent concerning poverty that is rooted in cult leadership directives, rules and enforced practices. Most of the money earned by members is sacrificed to the organization. Members lack basic medical care owing, in many cases, to a lack of money and the cult's policies. Cult members lack retirement plans and other financial resources, and public institutions absorb those deficiencies.

When addressing the issue of reducing inequities and raising the basic standard of living of cult members, it is very important to understand the world in which cult members live, especially in terms of gainful employment. Many cult groups have an adversarial relationship with the outside world or mainstream society, and this situation has a profound effect on their access to employment opportunities. Totalitarian cult organizations deprive their members of conventional education within mainstream society because of perceived threats to the group's ideology. In order to address inequities concerning rights and to promote social development and inclusion, resources for the provision of proper information must be made available to all.

The difficulty that the Federation has observed over the decades is that many cult members lack essential information concerning their individual rights that can help them, including information about high-quality higher education, including academic requirements, that could provide more options for gainful employment.

Cult members need the social progress and better standard of life that stem from greater freedom. The standards to be developed by the Commission for Social Development in its fifty-third session are designed to address these issues. The worldwide scope of the phenomenon of cult members residing in highly restricted and closed environments is truly striking. Informed consent is at the heart of fully informed decision-making in an open, free society, and most destructive cults restrict information and resources in many ways. An international standard for

equity and equality must be available to those who need it the most and it is Governments and related organizations that provide the necessary resources through education, as well as through implementation networks, globally.

Economic and social advancement must be available to all peoples, including cult members, who are denied access through no fault of their own. Cult organizations prevent their members, through group rules and policies, from accessing the rights and services set out in 1969, in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, and in 1995, at the World Summit for Social Development. The agreed policy needs to apply to families afflicted by cults. Serious educational efforts are required to inform them. The implementation policies developed at the fifty-third session of the Commission could go a long way towards addressing this issue.

Beyond the right to economic and social freedom is the right to live in dignity and freedom and to enjoy the fruits of social progress. The Federation has observed over the decades that cult victims and some of their friends and family members suffer in inhumane living conditions in exploitive environments. Many cults mandate the surrender of the personal assets of the cult member to the organization, with control over such assets and their distribution carried out without the input of the cult member. The exploitive double standards of the cult leadership result in an affluent lifestyle for those who control the organization's resources, while the members live in deprivation owing to rules that create poverty and a lack of dignity. The conditions include virtual and actual slave labour practices which result in cult members living below poverty standards mandated by Governments. Some cult members who make good wages are conditioned within their group environments to hand over their earnings to the cult. Cult members receive meagre resources in return, well below poverty standards, and must pay their debts on their own. Most activity of this sort is not known to the outside world or mainstream society, in which at least minimum wage standards would apply. Human rights and dignity issues abound in these situations and effective global remedies are appropriate.

Another objective set out in the Declaration on Social Progress and Development is that social progress and development shall aim at the continuous raising of the material and spiritual standards of living of all members of society. This goal is also applicable to cult members and similar victims. Raising the standard of living where there is deprivation by design should be an achievable goal, and reporting structures need to be in place for violations of rights and human dignity. So much of the harm experienced by cult victims is rooted in their lack of information. Once social development guidelines become international government standards, it will be important to inform those who need to know about such standards through education and communication networks.

In order to address the social exclusion of sect victims, they need the empowerment skills and resources that the Commission has been addressing through ongoing developments and implementation policies. The Federation can network with government agencies and social service organizations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with common interests through contributions towards a more integrated set of self-empowerment goals. It is important to recognize that communities of cult members who are denied human resources because of cult rules need the help of NGOs that have extensive direct experience with such populations. The federation has worked with families that

need assistance, and the Commission can provide options for personal transition and self-empowerment that take into account the requirements of democratic institutions, including respect for all human rights, fundamental freedoms and equality concerning economic opportunities, the rule of law and the promotion of respect for cultural diversity. Cult members should have the opportunity to exercise their right and responsibility to take an active part in the affairs of the communities in which they live.

The enhancement of social protection and the reduction of vulnerability are rooted in high-quality education about the guidelines and policies of the Commission for Social Development, especially as they relate to the rule of law pertaining to the local context. The Federation can provide the resources needed to help those reaching out for assistance to access the implementation resources of the Commission. The widest definition of social development must be applied to those needing help in cults. Many cult members face the most basic deprivations, including hunger, concerning the post-2015 goals, which call for a healthy life for all, equitable and inclusive high-quality education and overcoming an adversarial relationship with mainstream democratic societies and its worthwhile institutions.

The cult population includes gifted and talented human beings motivated by high idealism and altruism. The tragedy is that most cults exploit and abuse their members, as academic, legal and interdisciplinary studies have demonstrated. The guidelines and policies to be developed in the fifty-third session of the Commission will have real meaning and the potential to assist those in cults to achieve many goals through access to proper resources and education.

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