



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission for Social Development**

#### **Fifty-fourth session**

3-12 February 2016

**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 The World Association for al-Azhar Graduates (WAAG), 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Introduction**

The World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates (WAAG) takes pride in being granted Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council. This statement aims to shed some light on the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates' role in strengthening social development in the contemporary world, at both local and international levels.

Since its foundation as a non-governmental organization registered by the Arab Republic of Egypt according to the Egyptian law no. 7145 for 2007 A.D/ 1428 H., the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates has made remarkable contributions to fostering social development through enhancing communication between AL-Azhar and its graduates worldwide on presenting the moderate image of Islam.

This statement attempts to clarify the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates perspectives on the priority theme of the 54th Session of the Commission for Social Development, namely "Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world". It also shows how the topic is related to the work of the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates. In addition, it will quote some of the association's achievements in supporting social development in different ways. Finally, the statement will highlight the main challenges to foster social development and the association's recommendations for addressing them.

### **Overview of the issue**

Understanding its role as a NGO with a special consultative status, the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates has been striving to strengthen social development, taking an advantage of its position as AL-Azhar platform of science, learning and dialogue with its branches in countries where great numbers of AL-Azhar alumni are found.

The World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates believes that it has developed both scientific and socially bound approach to rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world.

In fact, recent economic and political developments, particularly in the Middle East and North African Region, have given rise to numerous social problems and serious challenges that require collaborative efforts from both governments and NGOs to ensure sustainable social development to these societies. Therefore, new strategies have to be developed based on a multidisciplinary approach.

Rethinking social development requires appraising progress made in achieving the internationally-agreed social development goals, and identifying new trends and opportunities for social development. The World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates believes that the Economic and Social Council can play an effective role benefiting from its worldwide partnerships with more than 3,400 non-governmental organizations.

Moreover, rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world has become the most pressing challenge to the concerned parties. Ongoing armed conflicts, the rise of terrorist groups, and the impact of wars

on economic and social development have created a plethora of social development issues, including youths' inclination to violence and social disintegration, poverty, sectarianism, discrimination and religious extremism. The World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates follows an academic approach to solving the aforementioned problems by organizing symposiums, awarding scholarships and offering training courses to people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. It regularly invites alumni scholars to attend conferences and symposiums organized by its branches in many countries. In addition, it pays increasing attention to foreign students in Egypt by holding meetings to get acquainted with their problems and find the best ways to solve them. It also organizes seminars and conferences, and provides students with the opportunity to participate in cultural, social and entertainment activities.

### **Examples of accomplishments of the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates**

Since its inception in 2007, the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates has been actively involved in building bridges of understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim communities out of its firm belief in the universal Islamic message of peace, progress and cooperation. Allah the Almighty says in the Glorious Qur'an, "Cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty" (Al-Maeda, 5:2).

The World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates offers several activities to members living in Egypt and other countries around the world. It also offers scholarships in one of the Islamic science faculties at al-Azhar University such as Usul ad-Deen, Islamic Shariah, Arabic Language, Arabic and Islamic Studies and Islamic Dawah. Scholarships are offered at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Moreover, the association is considering a number of proposals to consolidate relations with AL-Azhar alumni scattered in Islamic and non-Islamic countries. It holds regular conferences, symposiums and training courses that help individuals develop their skills, lead a better life, and make more contributions to human and social welfare within their communities. The following list includes some of the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates' achievements in this area:

### **Conferences**

The First Annual Conference for AL-Azhar Graduates in the UK organized by the UK Branch of the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates (WAAG UK) (17 June 2012).

The Fourth International Conference of the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates titled "Al-Azhar and the West...Dialogue and its Limitation," (2009).

### **Symposiums**

Cultural Challenges Facing the Islamic Ummah (11-13 April 2006)

Cultural Challenges Facing the Islamic Ummah (1-3 April 2007)

Islam Hadhari Approach between Legacy and Contemporary Challenges (15-18 February 2008)

**Scholarships**

The World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates offers scholarships for foreign students to join AL-Azhar University in the field of Islamic and Arab studies to earn undergraduate or graduate degree (Masters/PhD).

**Training courses**

The World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates organizes intensive training courses for Muslims and non-Muslims, who wish to get acquainted with true Islam according to AL-Azhar's approach. The several workshops organized by the association help increase trainees' social awareness and help them contribute effectively to developing their communities.

**The way forward**

Out of its wide experience in the field of raising awareness of true, moderate Islamic teachings and social development issues, the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates realizes that there is much work to be done to strengthen social development. The impact of growing populations and lack of finance as well as infrastructure projects require closer cooperation between governmental, non-governmental, academic and financial bodies to support social development.

**Recommendations**

Considering the enormous challenges facing the efforts to strengthen and maintain social development, the World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates puts forward the following recommendations that aim at achieving wider social development:

- More programs and strategies for strengthening social developing in the contemporary world, have to be put forward and implemented carefully, with emphasis on the needs of the least developed countries,
- The CSocD should seek more advice from world experts and NGOs on rethinking social development for a post-2015 world.
- More efforts should be exerted in launching awareness-raising campaigns that promote dialogue on how to support and ensure social development at the international level.
- Special attention should be paid to the communities living in conflict zones where the basic social development elements are lacking.
- The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations should encourage more voluntary work and humanitarian efforts for strengthening social development.
- More effort should be put in providing more assistance to governments in devising multidisciplinary operational strategies that promote equitable social and economic development.
- There should be more coordination between governments and NGOs in order to raise awareness among youths to protect them from the adverse impact of radical thoughts, violence and terrorism.

- NGOs should receive more funds in order to play a greater role in the area of rethinking and strengthening social development.

The World Association for AL-Azhar Graduates hopes that it will continue to make useful contributions to social development efforts exerted by the Commission. The association appreciates the opportunity to be heard by a truly global audience and contribute to the Commission's agenda.

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