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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: Inclusive and resilient recovery from
COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and dignity
for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and
dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

Statement submitted by Imam Ali 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Challenges for the underrepresented communities in the marginalized regions during the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant majority of the people around the globe have been adversely affected by the unforeseen challenges caused by the virus. Slowing down the spread, many countries took stringent restrictive measures such as lockdown or stay at home orders, aimed at containing the crisis at a local level. Although horrendous shockwaves of the crisis hit every individual, they hit the most vulnerable hardest.

The recent pandemic devastatingly impacted on extreme poverty as a result of which women and children in lower-income or underprivileged communities suffered most of the consequences. At Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society, we realized fairly quickly that a precisely designed emergency response was needed to be employed in order to deal with lack of information about the disease, acute food insecurity, unemployment, homelessness, lack of access to online learning requirements, etc. Therefore, we primarily focused on the families, specifically women and working children who lived and worked in illegal recycling centers. When our volunteers, fully equipped with personal protective equipment entered the recycling centers, the first thing we noticed was that they had not heard even about the virus yet. We well informed and provided them with all the equipment required. We also distributed thousands of food packages among the families in the marginalized regions in Iran.

Supporting the front-liners, we supplied 25 hospitals with complete packages of personal protective equipment. Ventilator machines, masks, etc. were among the other equipment we provided the hospitals with, in deprived areas of Sistan and Baluchestan and other less-developed provinces in which we are active.

As the pandemic shuttered schools, disadvantaged or impoverished students coming from remote areas experienced a startling local version of a global problem, falling behind their peers. We ran numerous campaigns to narrow this mounting learning gap by helping these students have the devices they needed for remote learning such as tablets and smart phones. Moreover, since at the time more than 6000 children were receiving education in the Iranian Homes nationwide, we developed a hybrid system in compliance with all the national and international protective measures such that our children could continue their studies. Nearly 700 Women working in the Iranian Houses who are the head of the household would seriously suffer as well from the long economy shutdown. Alongside the distribution of personal protective equipment and food packages among the underrepresented families, we made sure they could continue working from home. In addition, we held online sales events to help them sell their products.

Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society has made every endeavour to play its role in controlling the situation. We all seem to have a lot to do yet, in our big fight and desperate struggle to make the world a better place for everybody.