



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled  
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace  
for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals, 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**

The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals is an Iranian non-profit, non-governmental public charitable organization that was established in 1999 (official registration no. 11201).

The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals primary objective has been to utilize innovative prevention and timely crisis intervention methods and to contain social problems through educating and training for different layers of community, especially for women who are head of families.

The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals educational and training programs raise society's awareness and encourage policymakers' collaboration in order to amplify the positive role of different elements of society in resolving challenges, to better assimilate certain disadvantaged individuals within the society and to improve certain selected treatment methods while always being respectful of individual privacy at local or national levels.

Despite many cultural impediments, The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals has placed over 200 AIDS-orphaned children from across the country under a comprehensive support program, has received the special consultative status from the United Nation's Economic and Social Council, has held over 100 educational seminars on how to prevent the spread of the HIV virus and how to live with AIDS, has held numerous empowerment and skill training seminars targeting HIV infected women who are heads of households and has consistently provided free phone counselling services, social work and other related counselling services to a vast number of high-risk individuals.

The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals programs in support of female head households, who are affected by HIV/AIDS, focus on changing the attitude and perception of the society at large and of the local communities where these individuals live and work. The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals programs aim at creating a comprehensive approach that is based on specific physiological, familial, social and cultural conditions of each person.

Below are three of The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals programs that specifically target empowerment of women with HIV/AIDS (in particular, those who are also female heads of household):

### **Individual counselling**

Individual counselling sessions are designed to accomplish the three primary goals of prevention, tutoring and therapeutic intervention.

In order to respect the individuality of each member of female heads of household with HIV/AIDS, these individual counselling sessions comply with the principle of establishing and maintaining mutual trust between the counsellor and client. Counsellors or social workers devise an advance treatment plan that is based on the specific information received from each HIV/AIDS affected individual and

avoid making pre-judgments on the correctness of the relevant person's behaviour and with full regard to the principle of confidentiality and centrality of active cooperation of the relevant person's family.

The ultimate goal of these individual sessions is to guide clients on the path to healthier and more conscious living through nurturing the clients' individuality and self-confidence and through actively participating in the society and in resolving highly stressful situations.

The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals believes that prevention is most effective when it is accompanied with education in a continually maturing environment. In individual therapeutic intervention counselling, the counsellor/social worker constantly monitors the client's behaviour as an instructor/facilitator and transfers the reinforcement necessary to react to clients' feedbacks when necessary.

### **Health Advocate Mothers**

Women and children are among the most vulnerable stratum of society. When infected with HIV/AIDS, this group faces intense stigma both from family members and society. This stigma is most often associated with socioeconomic barriers. Improper and disparaging attitudes, total loss of job security and other obstacles, augment the spread of HIV/AIDS by isolating patients, depriving them of educational opportunities and as a result encourage affected individuals to hide their infection.

The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals Health Advocate Mothers was established pursuant to studies that show that the main concerns facing female heads of households with HIV/AIDS is anxiety, insecurity, rejection and confusion over their fate as well as the fate of their children. In order to alleviate such grave concerns, The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals has formed a support group called "Health Advocate Mothers". The aim of this group is to transform some of the female heads of household with HIV/AIDS into information ambassadors in the society who combat social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

Education for "Health Advocate Mothers" is done by holding group therapy sessions, using scientific methods based on social work and psychology. The weekly group therapy sessions provide an environment where clients can interact with peers who not only understand their problems or concerns, but also have, in many cases, the same or similar concerns. The emotional and mental stress and needs of HIV positive women (especially those who are head of a household) is often overlooked and these weekly sessions create an environment where our clients learn to freely express their true emotions and thoughts away from hatred and judgment.

### **Vocational training**

Another major hurdle for women with HIV/AIDS in Iran is finding the appropriate occupation. These women are mostly from underprivileged socioeconomic classes and therefore lack the proper skills for employment. The disease, lack of skills, shortage of proper training facilities and macroeconomic and

cultural problems are all daily challenges faced by this targeted group. The Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals attempts to address these challenges by providing vocational training opportunities through sewing and knitting workshops.

The main objective of these workshops is to empower female heads of households with HIV/AIDS by teaching them necessary skills and giving them the tools to be more self-reliant. After completion of the training programs, clients are either given financial aid to start on their path to independence and/or are referred to institutions with job vacancies.

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