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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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Imam Ali NGO works with more than 3000 women and children in slum areas of Iran and is also active in Iraqi Kurdistan. We have more than 10,000 volunteers around the world. Refugees (Afghan, Pakistani, Syrians) and migrants are the main purpose community. The main goal of the programs and activities of our NGO is to empower them.

In today's world, there are many obstacles around the empowerment of women who live in urban environments. These obstacles originate from irregular immigration from rural regions, loss of rural employment, industrialization regardless of human development index and lack of social facilities.

By gathering volunteers and gaining public attention to social problems, we define different projects in slums and rural areas. The projects are defined in levels including: a) individuals, b) community-based, c) public awareness, d) advocacy at national and e) international levels.

(a,b) Individuals and community-based

We define several projects as instruments for empowering women:

(1) establishing Economic Empowerment Centres:

We have ten Economical Empowerment Centers (EEC) and fifteen new born EEC all over Iran. In this EECs women are learning different skills and working in knitting, sewing, pottery, stained glass, needlework, cooking, cookery, handicrafts, carpet weaving, etc.

(2) Peddler Women Academy:

In one of the regions, we started a pilot project three years ago for providing an academic environment for those women who have been deprived of any kind of education and have been forced to peddling. In this academy we provide different courses on psychology and parenting, law, public health, nutrition, sports and arts. Each woman becomes a trainer for new groups of women.

(3) Congress of deprived women:

As Imam Ali NGO is working in 35 different slum areas, and as the best informers are among native women, we decided to choose women as the representatives of their neighbourhoods. They gather monthly and discuss problems within their regions. The outcome of these discussions are then reflected by rules and criteria that are developed, which are used by the broader members of the NGO for advocacy purposes.

We believe that socially disadvantaged women's empowerment is based on the following approaches:

(1) Human development, evaluation based on Erickson's theory:

by using arts, play therapy with psychological approaches and practices we help women to recognize themselves and pass the several stages of Erikson's development theory.

(2) Decrease the gap between reality and their expectations of their lives:

By providing basic needs, we help them face less problems in the reality of their lives. We help them to figure out the uncovered part of their capabilities and cultural focal points to moderate their expectations of their lives. Compromised level of the reality and the expectation help the woman to reach satisfaction and get ready to accept new roles.

(3) Expanding their choices in their lives: we provide access to different services (social, medical, economical, educational, psychological), and build different social environments for women to help them experience new choices and accept the responsibility of choosing.

(4) Self-actualization and achievement the positive identity based on their cultures: each woman finds herself in different roles at the small communities provided by the NGO and getting ready to enter bigger communities at different levels of the society. Roles such as good mother, social worker, teacher, efficient entrepreneur.

(5) self-blooming and happiness

the outcomes of the above approaches appear in internal happiness, intellectual independence, self-confidence. Self-blooming in women appears in mothering, which means uniting the family, community building, caring for the others.

(c) public awareness

volunteers are also empowered in the activities. Women play a great role in raising public awareness.

1. holding different meetings, events such as seminars emphasizing on national and religious rituals as instruments for raising awareness indicating on each person as an actor for eradicating poverty and social problems. Since 1999, Seminars specialized on women issues include:

seminar on runaway girls (Fatima);

seminar on addiction and pregnancy;

seminars on empowerment of women head of household;

seminars on social issues affecting pregnancy period (Madaraneh);

seminars on women in ethnic minorities.

2. Making social movements by using media, virtual causes.

We use social media and virtual causes in order to absorb potentials to empower women.

There are women celebrities who join us on our empowerment programs.

(d) National and international advocacy

In order to rectify the laws for the interests of purpose community:

- holding several meeting in different ministries like department of women's affair

- Carrying out petitions and campaigns on women's' issues
 - Publish statements on women issues
 - Volunteers as human rights watchers in war affected areas of Iraq
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