



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
21 November 2014
English
Original: French

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-third session

4-13 February 2015

**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 Fondation Ostad Elahi: éthique et solidarité humaine, 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.



Statement

Rethinking and strengthening the well-being of older persons

Through the increasingly significant lengthening of life expectancy, progress in medicine has led to a greater proportion of the elderly population in many countries. However, the quality of life to which persons in that age category are entitled suffers from increased risks of degenerative ailments, such as Alzheimer's disease, and the growing complexity of intergenerational relations in view of major changes to the family structure (in the form of, inter alia, single-parent and reconstituted families) in societies characterized by pronounced individualism. As a result, older persons face ever greater isolation, loss of self-esteem and control over their lives, poverty and malaise. The matter is crucial to social cohesion and even social balance.

The following general measures can be planned in order to mitigate those problems:

(a) Fostering, at all levels of society, ethical awareness, which makes individuals more sensitive to the situation of others. In particular, individual ethics teaching should be developed in primary through higher education and adapted to each educational level. Within the family, such teaching would strengthen intergenerational ties by encouraging adolescents and young adults to attend to their grandparents while profiting from their experience;

(b) Developing associations in the area of support for older persons and, in parallel, promoting such persons' employment on a voluntary basis, particularly in community-based structures providing help with homework. Numerous examples show that such support by retirees is effective;

(c) Highlighting the value of old age: often perceived as decline, old age is actually a phase in life that should be viewed as particularly conducive to the transmission of experience and values. Contact with older persons can help young persons to learn tolerance, patience and respect;

(d) Stimulating the older persons' curiosity and desire to learn by enhancing their access to knowledge, especially through university structures;

(e) Encouraging the development of spirituality in older persons: recent medical research has shown that spiritual practice, in the form of prayer, meditation, reading of sacred texts and a feeling of communication with the transcendental, has obvious effects on health. It enables such persons to face disease, pain and the idea of death with greater serenity. For instance, the importance of spirituality to successful ageing may be highlighted in appropriate structures, workshops, conferences and debates led by psychologists, philosophers or persons belonging to a religious order.