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THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

**Written statement* submitted by the Hariri Foundation – The Islamic Foundation for
Culture and Higher Education, a non-governmental organization
in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 January 2004]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The right to development

1. Honorable Commissioner and members of the Commission, I thank you for affording the Hariri Foundation the opportunity to participate in this important session. The United Nations Millenium Development Goal of ensuring that all girls and boys complete a full course of primary schooling by the year 2015 is a goal the Hariri Foundation takes most seriously. Indeed, closing the gap between female and male literacy rates in Lebanon, and achieving a significant increase in the rates of adult literacy, particularly that of women is of the highest priority for us.
2. For more than twenty years now, the Hariri Foundation has been at the forefront of the struggle in Lebanon to raise the standard of education and to promote higher education. We struggled to maintain the Lebanese educational infrastructure throughout the Lebanese civil war in spite of the destruction of hundreds of schools, often in villages or cities left ablaze from the fire of attacks.
3. Since the end of the civil war, the Hariri Foundation has supported the restoration of existing schools as well as the establishment of new schools, universities and other educational institutions which serve thousands of Lebanon's youth. Those institutions include Lycee Abdel Kader Beirut, Hariri High School II, Rafic Hariri High School and Baha'eddin Hariri School in Sidon, the University Institute of Technology and the Hariri Canadian University. Each of these institutions provides scholarship assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
4. Perhaps the best known program supported by the Hariri Foundation is the University Loan Program, through which over 5,000 Lebanese students received loans covering tuition fees, health insurance, books, living allowance and transportation for university studies abroad, most prominently at universities in the United States, Europe and North Africa. When we factor in the many students who have received student loans and scholarships from the Hariri Foundation since its inception, for study at home or abroad, the total number of students assisted by the Hariri Foundation exceeds 32,000. At several universities in Lebanon, students receiving tuition assistance from the Foundation accounted for 45% of the total number of enrolled students. Although currently this tuition assistance program for study aboard is largely curtailed, to this day, the Hariri Foundation is dedicated to advancing the development of Lebanon by restoring Lebanese educational institutions and by raising national education standards.
5. Nationally, our challenges are trying. The pluralistic structure of Lebanese society reflects a rich mosaic of a very broadly diversified people. Our recent past has taught us how fragile that mosaic can be. In that connection, the Hariri Foundation is convinced that perhaps the only truly effective and lasting means of unifying a diverse array of communities is through education. Yet to that end, there are hurdles every step of the way. Revising curricula, deciding whether or not to include sex education and religious education are only a few difficult issues to mention. Yet another serious challenge lies in how to strike a balance between maintaining a centralized and unified education system in the plethora of communities that comprise Lebanese society, while affording educational institutions the autonomy they need in order to flourish intellectually.

6. Regionally and culturally we are faced with specific challenges in education. Gender parity indexes on literacy indicate that in the Middle East and North Africa, rates are significantly lower than they are in Europe, East and Central Asia, the Pacific and Latin America. Female participation in the labor force regionally is among the lowest in the world. Although the disparity is steadily decreasing, closing gender gaps in literacy rates is a complex issue. Literacy must be linked to career orientation, which in turn must be tied to employment opportunities in order to positively affect the development of women.

7. Rural poverty presents a serious problem. Reaching women and children located in poor and remote areas is critical. Often although a necessary law may be in place that theoretically ought to effect the desired change, local traditions may hinder its application. In some rural areas, social norms prevent girls from going to school unless their teachers are female. For remote rural areas, it is nearly impossible to meet that demand unless female teachers are recruited locally.

8. World Bank indicators show that regionally, progress in increasing female education, reducing fertility rates, increasing life expectancy and per capita income has been substantial. The problem however remains in “women’s economic participation and political empowerment.” While we are far from achieving our goals with respect to the economic participation and the political empowerment of women in Lebanon, we are committed to the belief that quality education is the only road that can lead to those goals.

9. Greater access to education for women positively impacts many other areas of development. Education of women leads to better overall family nutrition and health which potentially influence infant and child mortality rates. World Bank studies show that an increase in girls’ primary and secondary school enrollment has been shown to decrease infant mortality. Conversely, it can be said that gender discrimination, disparity in literacy, and inadequate access to education adversely impacts overall family health regionally. The Hariri Foundation is thoroughly dedicated to spearheading the effort to achieve the UN’s Millenium Development Goals in Lebanon with regard to education, literacy and the empowerment of women.

Our Recommendations to the Commission on Human Rights:

To that end, the Hariri Foundation recommends that:

10. The Human Rights Commission sponsor a regional conference on education that would:

- a) Address specific challenges to meeting the Millenium Development Goals in countries belonging to the Middle East and North Africa, and;
- b) Focus on how to raise the awareness of governments and the general public that the right to development is an internationally recognized human
