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Statement submitted by Global Autism Project, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Children with autism around the world are being mistreated and even murdered due to the locally accepted beliefs and the stigma associated with the condition. In March of 2017, the Founder of the Global Autism Project met a mother who had learned from spiritual healers that the treatment for autism was to float her child down the river. This approach would have inevitably led to the death of this child. This is not an isolated incident. This is a reality. This is a crisis. Our crisis.

The Global Autism Project is located in Brooklyn, New York whose mission is to promote the acceptance and integration of individuals with autism worldwide by training communities in culturally relevant, sustainable practices. The Global Autism Project currently partners with 12 pre-established centres/schools in People's Republic of China, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia with the purpose of offering sustainable strategies and trainings for their under-resourced centres to flourish in their local community. In addition to clinical guidance, the Global Autism Project promotes a sense of community by having annual regional conferences and a global summit so leaders from these sites can learn from one another and share triumphs and challenges. These newly formed relationships empower these local movements to overcome isolation and become leaders in service provision in their communities where quality programming were previously minimal to non-existent.

There is a lot of misinformation about autism internationally. In many parts of the world, autism is seen as a curse or influenced by demonic possession. In these areas, parents are outcasts unaware that their child could learn to be independent and successful. The commitment and dedication of the Global Autism Project's service partners allow for their learners to access an education. In many cases, without their centers or schools, students would be left at home not being given an opportunity to reach their potential. These programs are beacons of hope demonstrating to their communities, cities, provinces, and countries that individuals with autism can not only learn but can thrive and be fulfilled not hidden away or, in some cases, killed.

We know in many parts of the world some individuals with autism are locked away from society in their homes considered uneducable and an abomination. We know this assertion to be false. If there are quality educational services for special needs anywhere, then there should be quality educational services everywhere! The time is now to promote a sustainable model like the Global Autism Project to focus on training local entrepreneurs to be ethically-sound and clinically competent educators so that these students are given a chance. When given the right tools, local teachers will possess the knowledge to engage local stakeholders in their communities and together build a self-sustaining, locally-led and operated Centre of Excellence. A place where everyone can see that a child with autism has potential. A place that proves that floating a child downstream is not the only option.
