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**Annual ministerial review: implementing the
internationally agreed goals and commitments in
regard to gender equality and empowerment of women**

Statement submitted by ISHA Foundation, 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.

* E/2010/100.

Statement

Gender mainstreaming through sport

In India, Isha Foundation envisions a rural population full of enthusiasm to revive their village communities. Isha's mission is to facilitate holistic health care infused with sport and yoga; empower children with high-quality, affordable education and promote life in harmony with our environment. Simple yet innovative projects designed by Isha's founder promote women as essential actors in rural rejuvenation.

Villagers in Tamil Nadu increasingly struggle for daily subsistence. They are largely unaware of the environmental catastrophe that lies ahead owing to climate change, mass deforestation and unsustainable farming. The rural woman, crucial to the well-being of India's social fabric, strains under the responsibilities of earning and caring for her family in addition to other sociocultural commitments. Isha's physicians report that village women are especially prone to musculoskeletal disorders, owing to poor nutrition and strenuous physical activity. With vast numbers of women feeling left out and uncared for, the necessary enthusiasm to bring about much-needed changes is rapidly dwindling in their communities.

Since 2003, the biggest practical insight gained through Isha's work in over 4,000 villages is that sport has the power to unite people as a means to broader revitalization. Sports empower women to overcome social barriers, and provide a space to spontaneously revive traditional dances and songs. In the post-match celebration, women form circles in a lively chorus of rhythm, movement and laughter. The brief reminder of the joy of games is enough for women to continue playing in their communities.

In order to balance the competitive spotlight between women and men and to involve a maximum number of women, Isha promotes throwball, an adapted version of volleyball. Women's throwball uses the same court, ball and basic principles as volleyball and is best suited to include a maximum number of women of all ages. For the first time in Tamil Nadu, women are part of inter-village tournaments and state-level competitions. Isha's state-level tournaments, the hugely successful "Rural Olympics", gather thousands of spectators and competitors from throughout Tamil Nadu. In 2009, 329 women on 47 throwball teams participated in local and state-level competitions.

As a complement to its mobile and fixed health-clinic coverage of over 1,000 villages, Isha's sporting activities and specially adapted rural yoga classes address wellness at the physical and mental levels, reviving an indigenous method to prevent infirmity, restore vigour and alleviate mental stress.

Sport fosters a united community spirit that is conducive to holistic community action. Audiences are receptive to awareness about important issues, such as mother and child health, education and environmental conservation.

Key achievements: (a) Isha's health teams have spread nutrition awareness messages to tens of thousands during tournaments; (b) sport was pivotal in helping 2,000 children in six Isha Vidhya schools to welcome girls and boys of the lowest castes into their classes; (c) the 2006 "Rural Olympics" led to the successful state-

level mobilization of over 220,000 women and men as “Isha Project GreenHands” volunteers, who planted 856,000 trees in one day — a Guinness world record!
