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Statement submitted by Nord-Sud XXI, 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/2011/100 and Corr.1.



Statement*

Nord-Sud XXI recalls that 160 States have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which, by its article 13, obliges States to make primary, secondary and higher education progressively free. Nord-Sud XXI is extremely concerned that an increasing number of developed States are violating the right to education by failing to make higher education progressively free and by charging progressively higher tuition fees. Moreover, this violation is often done with discriminatory intention to impose higher tuition fees on foreigners than on nationals. Unfortunately, several States that have ratified this treaty and thereby undertaken to ensure free primary, secondary and higher education are acting in direct contradiction of this article. Some examples include the following:

- The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has progressively increased the cost of education since the 1990s so that today a Bachelor's degree can cost a foreign student as much as £40,000 per year
- Canada, a Party to the International Covenant since 1976, previously provided free higher education, but in the last 20 years tuition fees have risen five times; today a Bachelor's degree can cost a foreign student more than CAD 35,000 per year and about half that for a Canadian student
- In Australia, higher education was free until 1988; today a degree can cost between AUD 20,000 to 30,000 per year
- The Government of the Netherlands, which has been a Party to the International Covenant since 1978, previously provided free higher education, but since the late 1990s has progressively increased fees so as to prevent individuals from accessing higher education due to their ability to pay; today, Dutch universities charge an enrolment fee of more than €1,500 per year
- Germany previously provided free higher education but now charges an increasing enrolment fee, although it has remained modest compared to some other European countries.

These five examples are indicative of a movement by States to charge increasingly higher tuition fees for higher education. In the countries mentioned above and in many others, tuition fees have been a significant disincentive for the poorest and even middle-income students. This is regrettable and moreover is a flagrant violation of article 13 of the International Covenant.

The discrimination between foreign and domestic students in developed States also indicates that these States are discriminating in the application of the right to education. Article 13 requires at least that States do not raise the cost of tuition at universities and other institutions of higher education, and particularly in public institutions.

Nord-Sud XXI regrets the widespread violation of article 13 of the International Covenant and calls upon the United Nations treaty bodies, its specialized agency for education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Human Rights Council, and especially the Economic and Social Council, to bring this widespread violation of one of the most fundamental human rights to the

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

attention of the international community and the General Assembly and urge that action be taken to ensure compliance with article 13 of the International Covenant.
