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Statement submitted by Saviya Development 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.



Statement

We, the Saviya Development Foundation, are a non-governmental organization operating in southern province Sri Lanka since 1991. We gained special consultative status in 1998.

As we work on multi-sectoral fields, we were able to implement a project on civil society empowerment for democracy and good governance with the financial assistance of the United Nations Democracy Fund in 2011. Under this project, we were able to establish 47 information centres in libraries of all Pradeshiya Sabhas (local government authorities) in southern province.

The post-evaluation done by the Democracy Fund highly appreciated this attempt as a benefit to the community.

Although Sri Lanka has a high literacy rate of 91.2 per cent, we cannot ignore the fact that still a large number of people deprived of access to knowledge.

Libraries and information centres have always played a vital and significant role in access information and knowledge. Furthermore, libraries serve as the basis for their contribution to creating well informed citizens capable of exercising their democratic rights and playing an active role in society.

As we correctly understood the importance of access to knowledge and information, we were able to provide the people with an opportunity to access information centres connected to the libraries of Pradeshiya Sabhas and municipal councils.

Our new idea is to provide them with access to information and communications technology. We are all aware of the possibilities that such technology can offer in accessing knowledge and information.

Information and communications technology is evolving and new technology applications are being created every day around the world. Today, anyone in principle can produce content and put it online for the rest of the world to see and share. Hence, even a person living in remote rural village can have this facility and make him a global figure.

Access to information and communications technology in rural areas is more important considering the prevailing situation in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party presented a bill to parliament to formulate a right to information, which was defeated by the Government's majority vote in the parliament in 2011. Using Government-owned electronic and print media, the Government provides information which it wants to offer to people only.

Therefore, people have no faith in the views and news presented by Government media. They therefore use the internet and other such resources more and more.

For their studies, education and research, children or other interested peoples cannot buy the relevant tools or pay for internet. They therefore rely on the service of a library. If the library has an information and communications technology facility, then their aspirations are fulfilled.

In southern province, Sri Lankan people do not have considerable access to information and communications technology yet. If we had the possibility to provide libraries with computers for public use, it would be a great asset for people to be more knowledgeable.