



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
16 May 2011

Original: English

Substantive session of 2011

Geneva, 4-29 July 2011

Item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda*

High-level segment: annual ministerial review

Statement submitted by Fédération européenne des centres de recherche et d'information sur le sectarisme, 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.

Statement*

Educational endeavours in institutions of higher learning are rooted in intellectual and academic freedom in a free and democratic society. There are organizations that infiltrate and undermine those principles when students lack fully informed consent and are not aware of the ultimate goals of the organization when life-defining goals are being decided. It is important to address the serious issues that confront how these groups undermine and infiltrate educational institutions around the world.

After direct exposure to university and college students and their families worldwide for more than three decades, it has become abundantly clear that there is a consistent and repeated pattern from certain sect- or cult-like organizations that pose the following concerns. The issue of fully informed consent and accurate representation, when introduced, is crucial to decision-making and sound judgement. This is most important when sects use front names or disguised activities that hide the true intentions of the groups' represented goals.

Many university and even foreign students are particularly vulnerable to sect- or cult-like organization recruitment because they often grapple with becoming independent, encountering new responsibilities and relationships and adjusting to new environments and are anxious about their futures. It has been consistently observed with students who become involved with cults that they undergo induced personality changes, suffer academically and financially and become alienated from their families and friends or relationships of a lifetime. They become robbed of the very things that institutions of higher learning were designed to encourage: freedom of thought, intellectual growth and personal development and individuation.

There is a growing history of universities around the world banning or limiting cult-like organizations that have been causing demonstrable physical, psychological or emotional harm to students; interfering substantially with the educational mission of the institution; and violating institutional policies or applicable laws of the land. The number of students impacted can vary from campus to campus, but one factor they have in common is that the harm can be severe. Quality education and appropriate publications are some of the main tools to prevent harm to students. Uniformly, the experts in the field that deal with these problems indicate that education of the students works on solving the deceptive recruitment and retention issues. There are experts in this field that have developed models for institutions to follow in providing education to incoming freshmen through to graduation.

Policies for campus professionals regarding the recruitment of students and the consequences for violations of said policies should be clear. The mechanisms for reporting complaints should be posted where students have easy access to them. Groups that are identified in such complaints should be named and clearly identified and records maintained. This entire programme should be evaluated to ensure compliance with all applicable laws and institution policies. There should be an annual report documenting complaints received and actions taken.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.