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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b) Special theme of the fiftieth session² of the Commission based on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation

Statement submitted by Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council³

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ [E/CN.9/2017/1](#).

² Changing population age structures and sustainable development.

³ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Call for a stronger commitment to strengthen the family institution as a “window of opportunity” to achieve sustainable development goals

The Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) is an NGO accredited with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at the United Nations since 2009. Our work aims to strengthen Arab families through research, policy and outreach. We believe that in order to effectively address the consequences of changing population age structures and facilitate the Sustainable Development Goals, it is imperative to strengthen the institution of the family again.

The Social Summit Declaration identifies the need to “recognize the family as the basic unit of society and acknowledges that it plays a key role in social development and as such should be strengthened, with attention to the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of its members” (26-h). This understanding should receive significant attention in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, in paragraph 11, the 2030 Agenda reaffirms the Social Summit Declaration.

Why Does the Institution of the Family Matter?

Demographers, economists, and other social scientists have long debated the relationship between family dynamics and population change and their impacts on development. General agreement has emerged in recent years that strengthening the family institution can contribute to addressing issues related to changing population age structures. It is very important for the Commission on Population and Development to examine recent evidence in this regard.

A turning point has occurred in recent years. The sustainability of humankind’s oldest institution, the family is now an open question. Throughout history and in most countries, marriage has played an important role in anchoring the adult life course. But in recent years, and in some regions, marriage plays a less central role in the adult life course than it once did. In many regions, the rising divorce rate, non-marital childbearing, and delayed or foregone marriage have meant that many children and adults will spend a major portion of their lives outside of an intact and married family unit.

The decline in marriage rates is also likely to affect economic growth. Nonetheless, the world’s population is still growing. The United Nations projects that the global population could increase from 7 to 10 billion over the next 90 years. However, this growth constitutes a different kind of growth than we have ever seen before. Until recently, populations grew primarily due to the increase in the number of young people worldwide. Today, we are facing a world of rapidly ageing and declining populations, of few children — many of them without the benefit of siblings and a stable, two-parent home — of lonely seniors living on insufficient public support, of cultural and economic stagnation. It is not just the quantity of children that is in decline in more and more regions of the world but also the quality of their family lives, calling into question the sustainability of the human family. Strong stable families don’t just reproduce themselves; they also raise the next generation with the virtues and human capital to flourish as adult citizens,

employees, and consumers. And families headed by intact, married couples are the ones most likely to succeed in raising the next generation.

The challenges posed by global ageing would require many changes in social policies — i.e., social security and old-age pensions — as well as attitudes. One of the key challenges confronting countries with an ageing population in the near future involves guaranteeing an adequate level of income to older generations without placing excessive demand on younger generations and on national economies. This dilemma has direct implications for social security systems and their ability to achieve their goals.

The “second demographic dividend” — that depends on how the accumulation of wealth is related to population ageing — remains a theoretical proposition. The ageing of populations is accompanied by a rising proportion of females. Women make up a large majority of the eldest of the elderly. Also, increased longevity has led to the vertical extension of families; four and five-generation families, an increase in life expectancy for multiple family members simultaneously, and an increase in the number of older persons and a decline in the relative number of younger family members. This has had implications for social support structures and intergenerational relations.

It is vital to address the “care substitution” issues — a major concern for policy makers on whether the provision of formal support served to “crowd out” rather than to complement family support for those needing assistance. The issues were complex, since there were many dimensions of “care,” which differed in the degree of substitutability between the family and formal services. Evidence from both developed and developing countries show that family members continued to provide assistance even when formal assistance was available, and needy older persons were likely to benefit from having both types of assistance. Evidence had also shown that the availability of social services had the effect of “crowding in” family care by permitting family providers to focus on the types of support that they were best qualified to provide, such as affective support. A full consideration of the issues also required attention to the needs of caregivers and the costs to them of providing care, including opportunity costs.

The bottom-line message of “changing population age structures and sustainable development” is that business, government, civil society, and ordinary citizens would do well to strengthen the family — in part because the wealth of nations, and the performance of large sectors of the modern economy, is tied to the strength of the family. The lesson here is that countries wishing to enjoy robust economic growth, viable welfare states over the long-term and achieve SDGs, must maintain high fertility rates to avoid shrinking workforces and rapidly aging populations. Therefore, it is crucial to mainstream a family perspective into national development discourse to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion

The impacts of age structure on global development reinforce the importance of strengthening the family. The connection lies not only in fertility, but also in the crucial role of family in the education, socialization of child, and informal caregiving as well as in providing opportunities to youth that can foster

demographic dividends as well as achieve the SDGs. The Report of the Secretary-General on the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, [A/66/62-E/2011/4](#) clearly states that “families have a crucial role in social development. They bear the primary responsibility for the education and socialization of children as well as instilling values of citizenship and belonging in the society”.

In short, fertility is the most critical demographic variable in determining future populations and in achieving the SDGs. Therefore, we urge the Commission on Population and Development to encourage Member States to make every effort to strengthen families and to mainstream a family perspective into their policymaking to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
