



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on Population and Development

#### Fiftieth session

3-7 April 2017

Item 3 of the provisional agenda<sup>1</sup>

**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 session<sup>2</sup> 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 Alliance Defending Freedom and Mujer para la Mujer A.C., Observatorio Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe AC, Red Mujeres, Desarrollo, Justicia y Paz AC, Vida y Familia de Guadalajara A.C., a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>3</sup>**

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.

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<sup>1</sup> [E/CN.9/2017/1](http://E/CN.9/2017/1).

<sup>2</sup> Changing population age structures and sustainable development.

<sup>3</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

ADF is a not-for-profit international legal alliance of more than 2,200 lawyers dedicated to the protection of fundamental human rights. It has been involved in over 500 cases before national and international forums, including the Supreme Courts of Argentina, Honduras, India, Mexico, Peru and the United States of America, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the European Court of Human Rights. It has also provided expert testimony before several European parliaments, as well as the European Parliament and the United States Congress. It is accredited with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, as well as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union (the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the European Parliament).

Vida y Familia de Guadalajara is a private Mexican welfare institution that cares for socio-economically vulnerable pregnant women and helps them achieve post-natal social integration through education and skill-building. Mujer para la Mujer is a non-governmental organization that works to promote the fundamental human rights of women, with a focus on improving the lives of rural women of the various indigenous communities in Mexico. Construye is a Mexican non-governmental organization that highlights the value of women in the professional, social and family spheres through the compilation of information, the exchange of better practices, and promotion of men and women's development. Red Mujeres is a Mexican organization across 28 states that works on women's integral development in order to correct gender imbalances and achieve nation and society wide development gains. ANCIFEM cultivates women leaders across Mexico in order to generate a culture of respect for the dignity of women.

At this fiftieth session of the Commission on Population and Development, we call upon Member States to reaffirm our immutable human rights with a particular focus on changes in population age structures and sustainable development, such that no one is left behind. Paragraph 6.16 of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development recognizes that the decline in global fertility levels, coupled with continued declines in mortality levels, is currently producing fundamental changes in the age structure of the population of most societies. This change can be seen most markedly in the rise of numbers of older persons as a proportion of overall population.

An ageing population brings a number of economic and social impacts that must be addressed properly and correctly in order to both assist older persons and contribute to the overall health of society. This includes, in line with internationally binding human rights instruments, the promotion of the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society as a means of securing intergenerational solidarity so as to protect the human rights of individual family members, the importance of caring for older persons, and increased youth employment. These three priorities must be the focus of all societies and States, rather than the promotion of morally controversial agendas that infringe upon the fundamental human right to life, such as abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide.

Article 6 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that every human being the inherent right to life, which is to be protected by law and that no one is to be arbitrarily deprived of his life. The right to life is not just a "freedom to live" on the part of individuals, but also a duty on the part of the

State to protect life and to not arbitrarily deprive anyone of it. Society and the State must, in line with international law and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, aid in the realization the self-reliance of elderly people by way of creating conditions that ensure the right to life and promote their quality of life, develop systems of health care and social security for them, and enhance the ability of families to take care of their elderly members. This then must be coupled with the implementation of policies designed to maximize the utilization of as much of the working age population as possible, as well as to promote the institution of the family, partly in order to reverse the decline in fertility and birth rates and to aid in their recovery, such that a more balanced societal age structure can be re-achieved.

Both from a human rights-based approach and a development-based approach, the promotion and protection of the institutions of marriage and the family represent and remain the best means of dealing with the challenge of changing population age structures. Civilization thrives when all of its members are able to adequately support each other and bring their own unique gifts and insight to the table at all stages of their life cycle, and marriage and the family, when empowered to function as they should, facilitate this by taking pressure off of the State, building solidarity between generations, and providing basic networks of love and support for individuals. This was recognized in the most recent Human Rights Council resolution on the protection of the family, Resolution 32/X, in which it is stated that policies and measures to protect the family can have a positive impact on protecting and promoting the human rights of all of its members.

Paul Ehrlich's 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, made the argument that overpopulation would lead to mass starvation. This never happened. We now face a distinct but equally disastrous fate — a demographic “time bomb”. In much of the world, low birth rates have resulted in an ageing population and fewer young people to support older generations and drive development. This is not the time to call for smaller family size. On the contrary, this is the time to celebrate the unique contributions of every person on the planet and, in particular, young people, who are uniquely equipped to drive development. We applaud the legacy of the International Conference on Population and Development, which has made it clear in paragraph 7.24 of the Programme of Action that abortion is not to be promoted as a method of family planning and in paragraph 8.25 that it is the sovereign right of a State to determine its own laws on abortion. In accordance with the International Conference, we call upon Member States to highlight the fact that people represent our greatest resource for development and to underscore the value of thriving, vibrant populations for sustainable development.

Sustainable development is not possible without attention to the vital role of the family. This fiftieth session of the Commission is a critical opportunity for the United Nations to condemn coercive population targets and to recognize people as the driver of development — a task that was undertaken more than twenty years ago in Cairo and which continues even until today. Focusing instead on creating conditions conducive to human flourishing and encouraging strong family structures will have the effect of providing young people with the opportunities that they need to contribute to lasting sustainable development, as well as safeguarding the human rights of all members of society, especially those who are at the most vulnerable stages of their lives.