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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world

Statement submitted by Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society and Association of United Families International, non-governmental organizations 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 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

“The ultimate goal of social development is to improve and enhance the quality of life of all people” (Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development).

The twentieth anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development should call to mind the Programme of Action’s affirmation of family, parental rights and respect for religious and cultural values. These important principles should be reaffirmed as we gather to rethink and strengthen social development in our contemporary world.

A family-centred framework

Our challenge is to create a family-centred framework for social development to guide us now and in the future, to build a culture of cooperation and partnership and to respond to the vital needs of all human beings.

A growing body of research, surveyed in “Marriage and child well-being: research and policy perspectives”, by Susan L. Brown, shows that the family is indispensable to the welfare of society and to the individuals that comprise it. The benefits that flow to children and adults from two-parent married families include: increased educational attainment, substantially less poverty, better physical and mental health, less crime in communities and more healthy socialization overall. These benefits are then directly reflected in society and the nation as a whole.

According to *Strengthening the Family: Implications for International Development* (United Nations University Press, 1995), even in situations of dire poverty, the most important factor influencing outcomes for individuals is whether they are members of a strong, stable family.

Bearing this in mind, the Association of United Families International has produced a booklet entitled “The marriage advantage”, available at www.unitedfamilies.org.

In the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the need to “recognize the family as the basic unit of society, and acknowledge 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” is identified. This understanding should take precedence as the international bodies move towards the conclusion of the post-2015 development agenda.

The book entitled *The Family and the MDGs: Using Family Capital to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals* shows how international goals can be accomplished by focusing on the family unit. The information contained therein is equally applicable to the post-2015 agenda. (The book is a combined effort of the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, the Association of United Families International, the Family First Foundation and the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development.)

Respect for parental rights

The nurturing care of a loving mother and father can be the most significant contribution towards realizing effective social development and enhancing the lives

of all people. It is primarily the responsibility of the parents to mould the character of the future citizens of the world.

Commitment 6 of the Copenhagen Declaration expressly states that responsibility for the education and guidance of children lies first with parents: “Establish or strengthen both school-based and community-based health education programmes for children ... recognizing the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents”.

Yet we still see attempts to place parental rights in subjugation to agencies and governing bodies that claim, in language citing the best interests of the child, to know what our children need, or what is age appropriate or what children’s evolving capacities entail. We grow increasingly concerned as we see parents removed from the decision-making process and Governments planning to teach children about their “sexual rights” and their “reproductive rights”. We are also concerned about the supposed need for highly controversial “comprehensive sexuality education” programmes, with nary a mention of parental involvement, let alone the need to garner parental consent.

We submit that no individual or governmental body knows the considerations mentioned above as well as the parents. No individual or governmental body has a more vested interest in the health and well-being of children than their parents. All levels of Government, as well as non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, should recognize, respect and support the vital role of parents.

Recognizing religious and ethical values

According to the Copenhagen Declaration, effective and sustainable social development can only evolve with “full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds” of each Member State. Ongoing development planning, programmes and documents should reflect that understanding.

In support of religious, ethical and cultural values we:

- (a) Emphasize basic prenatal and postnatal maternal health care;
- (b) Encourage the birth of healthy children and oppose coercive methods to limit family size;
- (c) Oppose efforts to promote abortion;
- (d) Oppose comprehensive sexuality education and sexual rights, which may be in opposition to religious values.

Recognizing the religious and cultural values of the countries involved is also supported in social development strategies that are outlined in other United Nations treaties and conference documents.

Conclusion

According to the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond ([A/66/62-E/2011/4](#)), as basic and essential building blocks of societies, 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. Strong families are the very key to effective and sustainable social development in the contemporary world.

“We recognize, therefore, that social development is central to the needs and aspirations of people throughout the world and to the responsibilities of Governments and all sectors of civil society. We affirm that, in both economic and social terms, the most productive policies and investments are those that empower people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities” (Copenhagen Declaration). We submit that the best place to develop these capacities, resources and opportunities is within a strong, stable family.

To this end, we encourage a commitment:

(a) To place family at the centre of development and direct our economies to meet the needs of families more effectively;

(b) To share good practices on family policies, review challenges faced by families and recommend viable solutions;

(c) To ensure that Governments, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations and academic institutions share good practices and data for family-oriented policy development, as well as for the implementation and monitoring of family well-being.

Finally, the family, as the fundamental and basic unit of society, requires conscious recognition and inclusion by United Nations agencies and governmental entities. The family forms the backbone of society, and enables a more prosperous and just future. A wealth of social science research data demonstrates that a strong family unit contributes to the strength and stability of the community, the nation and the world.
