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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 Universal Peace Federation, 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 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The wellbeing of children depends on many critical factors, such as economic stability, nutrition, clean water, health care, education and conflict-free societies. As the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicate, we need to improve all of these. However, one factor ensuring children's well-being that has been left out is the role of parents and family stability.

Research and common sense robustly affirm that children raised by their parents in a stable home gain multiple advantages that cannot be replaced by government or social policies and agencies. Parents are the best advocates for their children and know best what their children need. As primary caregivers, parents are the ones who actually take children to school, make sure they receive medical attention and protect them from harm, to name just a few roles. More importantly, parents teach children values and responsibilities necessary for functioning optimally in society. Only when society consists of citizens who are instilled with conscientiousness, compassion, self-discipline and responsibility can we have a stable and thriving society. Parents who can form stable families hold the key to social development.

In the contemporary world we are faced with many challenges, including family instability. Within the family, those who suffer the most from instability are children. Whether they live in developed or developing countries, children of single mothers are much more likely to live in poverty. Divorce is associated with increases in children's drug abuse, depression and dropping out of school.

Due to many social, economic and cultural factors, it is harder than ever to successfully hold a family together in contemporary society. Instead of ignoring the weakening of the family, we need to address the fact that parents and families need support. Family-oriented policies could lift some of the economic and care-giving burden from parents. Family-focused programs and education could give parents practical information about communication, handling conflict, respecting men and women, and effective, non-violent discipline of children. Families empowered with social tools would be more likely to cooperatively solve problems and be less reliant on government financial aid.

From a wealth of data, the importance of parenting and the family for social development is clear. Unfortunately this has become less clear in the media and culture, which promote individual freedoms more than social responsibility and the fulfilment that comes from thriving family relationships. Human relationships are one of the most difficult tasks in life. They can cause the most heartache and pain but also fulfil a great sense of purpose and life-satisfaction. Promoting a family-centred culture, which encourages the wise selection of a mate, strong marital commitment and fidelity, and responsible and loving parenting, will strengthen the family to do what only it can do best. Addressing the reality that the family is the fundamental and natural group unit of society that deserves utmost support and protection from society and governments will be a key to the social development necessary for achieving the SDGs.