



# Family Matters



Circular No. 10

Follow-up to the International Year of the Family

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## The United Nations Subprogramme on the Family

The Follow up to the International Year of the Family is the responsibility of the Division for Social Policy and Development within the Department for Economic and Social Affairs. The follow-up activities to the International Year of the Family are in accordance with intergovernmental mandates e.g. General Assembly resolutions 47/237 of 20 September 1993 and 50/142 of 21 December 1995 respectively.

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## Third Committee Statements on the Family

The Third Committee at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly considered social development questions related to youth, ageing, disabled

persons and the family. The Third Committee had before it a draft resolution on the Follow-up to the International Year of the Family recommended by the Economic & Social Council and a report of the Secretary General on the Follow-up to the International Year of the Family (A/52/57). Thirty-three speakers spoke on the topic of the family. Below are some of the statements.

The representative of Argentina stated that the Ministry of Social Development provides supportive actions to families as the protection of families is guaranteed by the Constitution. The report of the Secretary General was endorsed.

The representative of Colombia informed that a Regional Summit on Actions in Favour of the Rights of the Child: Balance and Perspectives@ on Latin America and the Caribbean will be convened under the initiative of the First Lady of Colombia in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, from March 1 to 3, 1998.

She went on to state that the family, as a central bonding agent in society, plays an important role in the construction of the social fabric.

The representative of Ecuador supported the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary General [document A/52/57]. She stated that the family had a crucial role to play in promoting and protecting all human rights, including the right to development. The representative supported the statement of the Rio Group.

The representative of El Salvador stated that his country was cooperating with other countries which believed that protecting families was important enough to incorporate into overall development. National actions include educating children in rural areas and assisting families of migrant workers. Measures are needed to strengthen the development of families. The protection of, and support for, families was a matter of civil, moral and spiritual values.

The representative of Guatemala stated that in the report of the Secretary General (document A/52/57), it unfortunately seems that more efforts are still needed to achieve national commitments related to the family especially in developing countries. It is necessary to strengthen the role of the different agencies and institutions of the United Nations in promoting, coordinating and providing technical assistance to governments on family matters. It is also important to seek agreement and concrete follow-up in the next session of the Commission for Social Development on this subject. The representative noted that a large majority of developing and least-developed countries still do not have the capacity to elaborate adequate policies and programmes in the area of the family and urged that the Trust Fund on Family Activities be strengthened. He called upon the international community to provide more contributions to it.

The representative of the Holy See noted that some people find themselves the victims of diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS, leprosy and cholera, which continue to take a devastating toll on human life. Many of these hindrances to social development have had a devastating effect on family. The

representative noted that poverty, homelessness, warfare, forced migration and exile, separation, sickness and disease and the breakdown of the moral order continue to take their toll on the family. He informed about a conference on *The Family, Gift and Commitment, Hope of Humanity*, which was sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Family and presided over by His Holiness Pope John Paul II. The Holy See will continue in its efforts to strengthen and safeguard the family, emphasizing the sacredness of marriage and the role of parents as the primary educators of their children. The Holy See calls upon all governments and societies to recognize the special and essential role that the family plays in society and in life.

The representative of Indonesia said that in his country, despite significant achievements in social welfare, goals for social progress were far from being realized. Indonesia was also implementing the concept of *Three generations under one roof* to maintain Indonesia's traditional concept of the extended family.

The representative of Iran emphasized the centrality of the family to the whole social structure and noted that it constitutes the basic unit of society - a fact recognized by the Declaration of the Social Summit. The question, rather, is how to give it comprehensive protection and support, as called for by the Declaration. The global problem, is how to protect the family from the nefarious impact of war, poverty, violence, moral decadence and the disruptive strains of constant change in societies. The global challenge, is how to provide the necessary environment at the national level for the institution of the family.

The representative of Kazakhstan stated that, in Kazakhstan, radical economic changes had affected all levels of the society, including large families, older persons and young people. Although there was an emphasis on social protective policies, some families could not be provided with the basic minimum needs. Legislation has been adopted to deal with major social problems affecting the population, including laws to provide support for children, assist families with children and provide housing for those in need. Attempts had been made to provide housing and day care for families and mothers with disabled children.

The representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriyya stated that the family plays a central supportive role to youth, the aged and the disabled. The disappearance of the extended family has created a need to support the elderly.

The representative of Malaysia stated that urbanization and development, including rapid economic growth, have brought about a lot of pressures and changes to the traditional family unit. The inability to cope with these demands have heightened social problems through the erosion of families. The family must be strengthened so as to enable society to withstand the pressures brought about by rapid modernisation. At the national level, Malaysia has continued with the implementation of its Family Development Programme.

The representative of Morocco, recapping numerous initiatives taken by her country, indicated that a Moroccan national charter of the family was launched and that Morocco had seen significant progress in such areas as family planning. It had drawn up a national social advancement plan to achieve progress in such areas as literacy for women. Morocco supported the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary General [A/52/57].

The representative of Nepal stated that the inter-relationship between family well-being and sustainable development has been the core message of many global conferences of the 1990s. The five core themes outlined in the Secretary-General's report namely, human rights; strengthening families; situation and needs of the child; advancement of women; and poverty eradication cover a wide range of important inter-related issues and influence the lives of peoples and nations. The representative took note with appreciation of the Secretariat's activities relating to the follow-up to the International Year of the Family, especially its role in the multi-year work programme for 1997-2000 of the Commission for Social Development.

The representative of Pakistan stated that his country recognizes the importance of the family in the consolidation of communities and social development. Strong and stable families are central to the well being and forging of social harmony in a society. The representative stated his country's endorsement of the objectives of the follow-up to the International Year of the Family cited in document A/52/57.

The representative of Paraguay, speaking on behalf of the Rio Group (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Honduras and Guyana) stated that the members of the Group gave particular importance to the topic of social development in all its aspects and were committed to the Declaration of the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development and its Plan of Action. He stated that the members of the Group were characterized by democratic regimes that respected individual freedoms where the rule of law was the norm. It was noted that the Rio Group gives special priority to the family. The Governments of the member countries of the Group appreciated the report of the Secretary General on the International Year of the Family (document A/52/57).

The representative of the Philippines stated that the family is the essential fabric that holds society together and is the most important social support system. The Philippines supports actions that would integrate a family-sensitive approach to development strategies and endorsed the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/57).

The representative of the Republic of Korea commended the Secretariat for its excellent work in the various fields of social development, particularly its report on the family, youth and the disabled.

The representative of the Russian Federation stated that the national Social Reform Program for 1996-2000 includes actions and programmes for families and that the rights of families are guaranteed.

The representative of Singapore noted that the family unit is the single most important means of perpetuating values, nurturing individuals, building self-esteem and providing stability in any society. However, in recent years, many parts of the world have witnessed the crumbling of the family. The high-rate of family breakup has in many ways, contributed to weak social discipline, free-reigning individualism, poor work ethic and even increasing crime rate. Contemporary debate on the integrity of the family unit has also been splintered between Eastern and Western values, men against women and the married against the singles. Internationally, it has not been possible to even give the family a standard definition that is universally acceptable. Singapore supports an approach which does not dwell on theory and concepts but focuses on activities at the local and national levels to increase awareness of the importance of the family and to encourage the public to discuss family issues. A good majority of the population values family ties and holds the institution in high regard. Singapore stresses five core Singapore Family Values, namely love, care and concern, mutual respect, filial responsibility, and commitment and communication. To promote them, a S\$1 million Family Values Promotion Fund has been set up. The representative concluded by saying that we must ensure effective and sustained follow-up of the International Year of the Family.

The representative of Sudan noted that the recommendations of all of 1990's International conferences contained provisions related to the family. These conferences agreed that the family is the basic unit of the society, that the welfare of the family is connected to sustainable development and development strategies should consider the rights of the family and that this indispensable institution should be integrated in all the activities of sustainable development. In spite of all this, the >Family=, is today subjected to uncertainty and distortion of its definition. The role of the family as a social unit has diminished. Attempts to manipulate the definition of the >family= aims at twisting this definition to adapt it to some of the phenomena in these societies. This approach has led to many of the social ills of today. For the Sudan, the family is the nucleus of the society; and the natural framework for the individual and the context which guarantees the mutual integration between the wife and husband. The family is the first root of a child, who is the pillar of the future in all societies. From this perspective, the Sudan accords the family special importance and it is at the forefront of the Sudanese social set up. Therefore, the Government adopted a policy for facilitating marriages since it is the natural beginning for establishing a family, which cannot be built outside this natural context. The Government attaches particular importance to the laws governing the rights of the family and its members. Special attention is also given to rural and migrant families. The Government has introduced the project of the AProductive Family@.

The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic stated that in his country, the family was of particular importance, since it provided the foundation for human development. Article 44 of the Syrian constitution makes reference to the family.

The representative of Trinidad and Tobago speaking on behalf of the CARICOM countries stated that the subject of the family is pivotal to a broad

spectrum of social policy and development issues. The forces of change that have created immense transformation in societies have brought profound change in family structures. The Plans of Action of many international conferences have recognized the challenges facing the family globally and the necessity to strengthen the stability of the family unit. CARICOM Member States are not immune to some of the problems afflicting the modern family and some countries have introduced legislation to overcome domestic violence, established family courts and have counselling and support programmes to assist families.

The representative of Venezuela stated that a relevant component of the strategy of social development is strengthening the family. In this regard, in collaboration with civil society, Venezuela has initiated social development policies that provide families with the necessary means for socialization. A network of child care gives the required nutritional and educational attention to needy children.

The representative of Viet Nam stated that his country has long recognized the social value of the family as a basic unit of society and this subject continues to deserve special attention. It is necessary to continue efforts to protect and preserve a nation's identity, its traditions and cultural values, including the role of family as the back-bone of the society. The representative endorsed the report of the Secretary General.

The representative of Singapore speaking on behalf of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) [ Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam] stated that ASEAN strongly believes that the state of families determines not only the moral tone and social aspirations of the society but its economic health as well. Strong family values and bonds, advocated by ASEAN countries, are therefore emphasised as the foundation for a strong and cohesive society. In their pursuit of economic development, ASEAN member countries have continued to strengthen the family as the basic unit of society. Within the ASEAN community, joint projects have been developed to promote community support for enhancing the family's capacity to care for children. Studies have also been conducted to assess the feasibility of establishing a computer-based information network for child and family development. It is in this context that ASEAN welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the Follow-up to the International Year of the Family and fully supported the recommendations contained in it.

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