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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Alliance Defense Fund, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Protection of the Family and its Members

The Alliance 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 the United States of America, Argentina, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, India and the Inter American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. It also has provided expert testimony before several European parliaments, as well as the European Parliament and the United States Congress. It has accreditation with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, as well as the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union (the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the European Parliament).

We enthusiastically welcome the discussion on the protection of the family and its members. 2014 marks the International Year of the Family, and as such, the 27th Session of the UN Human Rights Council represents an important opportunity to commemorate the vital role of the family and encourage States to reaffirm their commitment to its protection.

International law outlines a clear obligation on the part of States to protect the family. Article 10.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights states that, "The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children." The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the seminal declaration on human rights by the UN General Assembly, similarly heralds the family as the fundamental group unit of society. The argument for the protection of the family stems from its indispensable function in the birth and rearing of children. Families are charged with the critical task of raising the next generation, and as a result, strong and stable families are essential for flourishing societies.

The family bears the primary responsibility for the upbringing of a child—a responsibility that cannot be outsourced to the state or any other entity. Parents are their child's first and most important teachers, and they possess the unique opportunity to provide an environment filled with educational and economic opportunities. The role of the state is to support and protect the family to facilitate the development of healthy and engaged young people. The protection of the family entails an obligation on the part of the state to provide families with the tools and resources that they need to raise their children. The success and happiness of children is contingent on their ability to grow and thrive in stable homes where education, hard work, and personal initiative are cultivated. The ability of a family to provide such an environment greatly depends on their circumstances. Growing up in poverty and other difficult conditions limits the extent to which a family can provide for children, and in turn impedes the development of society at large.

The greater the economic resources available to a family, the greater freedom it has to explore opportunities for its children. This leads to more educated youth, who are better equipped to capitalize on available economic opportunities and contribute to the flourishing of society. It is evident that the power of the family can be harnessed to further a multitude of development goals ranging from maternal health to sustainable farming. Designing and implementing policies geared toward the advancement of the family, especially in the areas of poverty eradication, work-family balance, social integration, and intergenerational solidarity, will have a positively multiplicative impact on development.

Familial dysfunction stands in the way of children realizing their full potential—a tragedy for the individual, community, and state. The state thus has an obligation to foster the proper functioning of the family to improve the chances for a child to be raised in a stable family environment. Studies show that children benefit greatly from an intact family structure comprised of both mother and father. A 2006 UK study found that children without the benefits of such a structure are 75% more likely to fail at school, 70% more likely to have serious debt problems, and 35% more likely to experience unemployment or welfare dependency. It is thus in the interest of the state to afford the highest possible protections to the institution of the family and ensure that as many children as possible are raised in a stable home with both mother and father.

Conclusion

Families depend on the protections and freedoms that the government provides. Government, in turn, depends on families to nurture a vibrant young population. Given their symbiotic relationship, it is clear that if we fail to consider the importance of the family in the human rights and development discourse, the result is damaging to both the family unit and the state. If the protection of the family is not prioritized, we become complicit in allowing for the persistence of the social and economic dysfunction of the family. Strong families are the bedrock for authentic development, and it is only by protecting the family that the state can truly tackle the problems of our age.
