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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 Alliance Defending Freedom,
Mision Mujer AC, 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 and Vida y Familia
de Guadalajara A.C., 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Alliance is a not-for-profit international legal alliance of more than 2,400 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, and India, 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).

AXIOS Misión Mujer A.C. is a non-governmental organization in Mexico with fifteen years of experience working for and with adolescents through a preventive program and policy advocacy in favour of youth on the local, national and international level. Its main objective is to generate cultural change by providing preventive education to adolescents and counselling by means of strengthening self-awareness, self-esteem, family communication, promoting assertive decision-making and a sense of positive identification among vulnerable groups and supporting them in defining a life plan.

Vida y Familia de Guadalajara is a private Mexican welfare institution that cares for socioeconomically vulnerable pregnant women and helps them, through education and by building skills, to integrate into society after they have given birth.

Observatorio Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe 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 the promotion of men and women's development.

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.

Red Mujeres, Justicia y Paz A.C. works in twenty-eight states in Mexico and serves to empower women through trainings in business and finance to more effectively contribute to their families, communities, and country.

Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we call upon Member States at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development to commit to achieving the Agenda's goals and targets on social development issues, especially those related to the protection and empowerment of older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and youth. We note with dismay, however, the absence of any goals or targets in the Agenda designed to protect or promote the institution of the family. Empowering the family is a crucial prerequisite for lasting development and has multiplicative benefits for all of society.

In light of the 2030 Agenda's omission of the family, we urge Member States to continue focusing on empowering this most vital institution. As is recognized by the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the family, as "the basic unit of society," "plays a key role in social development and as such should be

strengthened” (Part B, Paragraph 26 (h)). The institution of the family is essential to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and will play a particularly key role in eradicating poverty and hunger, realizing health and well-being, ensuring access to education, and multiplying opportunities for full and productive employment.

Families are the most powerful vehicle for strengthening social development. Specifically, recent studies show that unbroken families are causally linked with the reduction of poverty. Where families are intact, there is an increase in social mobility, health, political engagement, and school attendance — all of which contribute to wealth. Where families are broken, there is an increase in substance abuse, violence, teenage pregnancies, and crime — all of which perpetuate poverty. In order to promote and protect unbroken families, governments must support and safeguard the institution of marriage.

Marriage — the oldest and most fundamental human institution — is the foundation of the family. Studies consistently suggest that families headed by a married couple, where children live with both of their biological parents, enjoy the highest levels of wellbeing. Indicators of wellbeing include: education, physical security, depth of relationships between children and parents, health, income, addiction, and employment. Unfortunately, statistics show that marriage is on the decline while, simultaneously, divorce rates are increasing. These changes have contributed toward an increase in the percentage of children born to unmarried women, and thus a decrease in the percentage of children raised in intact families. To protect the institution of the family, Member States should implement policies that encourage marriage, promote marriage as the context for procreation, and discourage divorce.

The family plays a crucial role in ensuring that all children have access to inclusive and equitable quality education. Growing scientific evidence affirms that a child’s family relationships are essential to improving his or her level of education. Recent studies confirm that, the more involved parents are in their child’s education, the more likely it is that the child will succeed academically. In fact, the best indication of a student’s success is not income or social status, but the extent to which the student’s family is involved. Children with involved parents, regardless of their income or background, are more likely to attend school regularly, have better social skills, achieve high grades and go on to post-secondary education.

Additionally, the family is integral to the promotion of healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages. From children in the womb to infants to the elderly, the family — with support from the medical community — is often best equipped to ensure health for the most vulnerable. This is especially obvious from statistics related to mental health and protection from physical abuse. Members of unbroken families, both children and adults, enjoy far greater mental health than those in broken families; and instances of physical and sexual abuse are experienced drastically less frequently by those living in intact families than those living in broken families.

We commend the Commission for seeking to strengthen the family through ensuring access to employment and for “foster[ing] policies that enable people to combine their paid work with their family responsibilities” (Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development Part C, Commitment 3, Paragraph (f)). As the family and the workforce are both vital to a flourishing of society, Member States

should carefully implement policies that advance both institutions, while insuring that the promotion of one does not lead to the weakening of the other. In the same way that strong families lead to strong economies, strong economies, by way of the workplace, should empower families by providing them with a means to obtain their basic needs and a method by which they may contribute meaningfully to society.

Supporting healthy family development is essential to strengthening social development. In rethinking and strengthening social development in today's world, we ask Member States to implement policies that efficiently direct resources toward strengthening the family. Such policies include support for healthy marriages and stable families rather than other structures, recognition of the family as a means to eradicate poverty, ensure access to education and employment, and foster health and well-being.

Conclusion

While we celebrate the attention that has been given to strengthening the family since the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration, we urge Member States to continue prioritizing the institution of the family despite its omission from the 2030 Agenda. Strong families are the backbone of strong communities and, ultimately, strong nations. It is in the context of the family that children first learn to trust others and where they develop a sense of solidarity. When the family structure is broken, children feel vulnerable in settings where they should feel secure, and experience isolation in settings where they should experience solidarity. When nations fail to implement policies that efficiently direct resources toward strengthening the family, sustainability is hampered and poverty is perpetuated. Therefore, we call upon Member States to implement policies that promote individuals to both form and maintain healthy families. Fostering a culture where families remain intact will contribute not only to the empowerment of individuals, but also to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.