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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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Women and Family in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

After three years of laborious negotiations, 193 Nations passed an Agenda that will guide the work of the United Nations for the next fifteen years. The document is titled, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (Agenda).

“The true test of commitment to Agenda 2030 will be implementation,” stated United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, at the Summit for the adoption of the new Agenda. “We need action from everyone, everywhere. Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals are our guide. They are a to-do list for people and planet, and a blueprint for success.”

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes the family as the “basic unit of society,” and that “women play a critical role in the family” (paragraph 29). Bearing in mind the statement of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, this paper will focus on the inclusion of the family for implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The Agenda mentions the family in five paragraphs. Two of the paragraphs deal with family planning. The other three recognize the importance of promoting:

- A nurturing environment for children in “safe schools and cohesive communities and families,” (paragraph 25)
- Overcoming poverty through increased productivity and incomes of “family farmers” (target 2.3)
- Sharing of responsibility “within the household and the family as nationally appropriate,” (target 5.4)

In addition to specifically mentioning the family in these paragraphs, paragraph 10 of the Agenda affirms “full respect for international law” that is “grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” which declares: “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State” (Article 16-3).

Paragraph 11 of the Agenda also “reaffirms the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits which have laid a solid foundation for sustainable development and have helped to shape the new Agenda.” This includes “the World Summit for Social Development, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Beijing Platform for Action.” The outcome documents for each of these conferences recognize “the family as the basic unit of society”.

The Beijing Platform for Action, in paragraph 29, specifically recognizes the importance of a woman in the family: “Women play a critical role in the family. The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of the family exist. The rights, capabilities and responsibilities of family members must be respected. Women make a great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, which is

still not recognized or considered in its full importance. The social significance of maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family and in the upbringing of children should be acknowledged. The upbringing of children requires shared responsibility of parents, women and men and society as a whole. Maternity, motherhood, parenting and the role of women in procreation must not be a basis for discrimination nor restrict the full participation of women in society. Recognition should also be given to the important role often played by women in many countries in caring for other members of their family.”

Nurturing environment for children

Children are our future. The most sustainable thing adults can do is to nurture our children and prepare them to become the future leaders of tomorrow. The Agenda encourages a “nurturing environment for children”.

The Beijing Platform for Action also acknowledges the important role of nurturing children in the following paragraphs.

Paragraph 39 recognizes: “The girl child of today is the woman of tomorrow. The skills, ideas and energy of the girl child are vital for full attainment of the goals of equality, development and peace. For the girl child to develop her full potential she needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual and material needs for survival, protection and development are met and her equal rights safeguarded” (Beijing, 39).

Paragraph 285(a) calls on governments, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, to “formulate policies and programmes to help the family, as defined in paragraph 29 above, in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles.”

And, paragraph 82(c), in Beijing +5, encourages governments to “develop or strengthen policies and programmes to support the multiple roles of women in contributing to the welfare of the family” with particular emphasis on the “upbringing of children and caring for other family members.”

Paragraph 18 of the Children Summit outlined the responsibility of the family to nurture and protect children from infancy to adolescence. And, “For the full and harmonious development of their personality, children should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Accordingly, all institutions of society should respect and support the efforts of parents and other caregivers to nurture and care for children in a family environment.”

Paragraph 81 of the Social Summit urges communities to help the family in its “supporting, educating and nurturing roles,” by:

- (a) Encouraging social and economic policies that are designed to meet the needs of families and their individual members, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members, with particular attention to the care of children
- (b) Ensuring opportunities for family members to understand and meet their social responsibilities
- (c) Promoting mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation within the family and within society
- (d) Promoting equal partnership between women and men in the family

The Agenda, in paragraph 25, also recognizes the important role of education for children by committing to provide, “inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels — early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational training”.

Overcoming poverty by recognizing the woman’s role on the family farm

Jastus Obadiah, a Kenyan humanitarian, noted that “projects that identify family as the entry point seem to have more success than those that target other social units” (see *The Family and the Millennium Development Goals*, page 25).

The World Bank reports that seventy-five per cent of the world’s poor live in rural areas. They site evidence that growth in agriculture is on average at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth outside agriculture. Action Aid USA reports that smallholder farmers produce more than half the global food supply and that women smallholders comprise an average of 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force of developing countries.

Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals seeks to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.” Target 2.a encourages governments to: “Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries.”

Shared responsibility in the home

The first paragraph of the Beijing Platform for Action encourages the principle of shared power and responsibility between women and men at home. Paragraph 29 acknowledges: “The upbringing of children requires shared responsibility of parents, women and men.” And, paragraph 179-d encourages education to change attitudes that reinforce the division of labour based on gender in order to promote the concept of shared family responsibility for work in the home, particularly in relation to children and elder care.

Paragraph 82-c in the five-year review of the Beijing conference also acknowledges the “social significance of maternity and motherhood, parenting, the role of parents and legal guardians in the upbringing of children and caring for other family members,” and promotes the “shared responsibility of parents”.

With this solid recognition of the family in the founding documents of the United Nations, this new Agenda will likely succeed or fail on the empowerment of the basic unit of society to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Indeed, a Report of the Secretary General of the United Nations stated: “In effect, the very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals.”

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