



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-seventh session

6–17 March 2023

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Association of United Families International, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

“It is in the roots, not the branches, that a tree’s greatest strength lies. If you know where you are from, it is harder for people to stop you where you are going” - Matshona Dhliwayo

Innovations and technological change have been a boon to all human beings. As the Commission on the Status of Women addresses the theme of how the digital age can empower women and girls, it would be wise to turn attention to how these technologies can assist the families of the world and the women and girls that are part of these families.

The expansion of digital platforms has provided tools for what is commonly referred to as “family history.” This has allowed global citizens to increase the connectedness of generations and dramatically increase intergenerational solidarity. The empirical support showing the positive impact of “knowing where you are from” - being connected to present and past generations - is robust.

Researchers Marshall Duke and Robyn Fivush of Emory University completed two studies, the first just months prior to September 11, 2001, and the terrorist attack on the United States. They found the more a child answered “yes” to questions about their immediate family history, the higher their self-esteem, the more positive their views and the stronger their individual sense of control over their circumstances. In short, the study found that comprehending and understanding your family’s history and narrative was a high predictor for some of life’s most affirming character traits.

The tragedy of 9/11 allowed the Emory University researchers to do a follow-up study, almost a decade later, and once again confirm: Children who know “where they come from” have increased resilience and are better able to respond to life’s challenges. Older children who reported knowing more about their family history and its stories showed “higher levels of emotional well-being, and also higher levels of identity achievement.”

A study from Oxford University showed that teenagers whose grandparents were actively involved in their lives were happier. They had fewer emotional and behaviour problems and got along better with their peers. “Close relationships between grandparents and grandchildren buffer the effects of adverse life events,” the researchers said.

From the University of Copenhagen, Professor Mads Meier Jæger found that extended family impacted children’s educational attainment. His research, published in the American Sociological Review (2012), discovered that, “In addition to siblings resembling each other, first cousins also resemble each other with regard to how much education they complete.” He also observed that aunts, uncles, and grandparents help children to be more resilient, by compensating for resources that may be lacking in their immediate family.

A 2011 study from the Journal of Research on Adolescence showed that grandparents have a positive influence on their grandchildren that is distinct from parent-child relationships. When grandparents stayed connected and involved with their grandkids, the children in both single parent and two-parent families “were kinder to others outside their immediate family and friends -- and, in some cases, smarter.”

Turns out, not only do families matter, but the more you engage and know about your family and its history the better the odds of successfully navigating life.

Some of the digital tools connecting families to those who came before include: Ancestry.com, Archives.com, FamilySearch.org, Roots Magic (app), and Genealogy Bank. Many of these resources are free to the user.

As the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women proceeds with its important work of exploring the importance of technology and digital tools, we urge delegates to emphasize and facilitate the acceleration of digital and on-line access for all. This effort will be better served by recognizing the importance of family history and its contribution to the empowerment of women and girls.

In closing, we quote the words of Michael Novak, former ambassador to the UN Commission on Human Rights, “The family is the seedbed of economic skills, money habits, attitudes toward work, and the arts of financial independence. The family is a stronger agency of educational success than the school. The family is a stronger teacher of the religious imagination than the church. Political and social planning in a wise social order begins with the axiom What strengthens the family strengthens society.... The roles of a father and a mother, and of children with respect to them, is the absolutely critical center of social force.”

We urge member states to fulfil their obligation undertaken in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights calling for “the widest possible protection and assistance” to “be accorded to the family,” including in the task of connecting the generations of the world.

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