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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: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The family is the natural social institution at the foundation of every society. It is the ecosystem where each individual member of the human family is conceived, develops, and grows to maturity. Sadly, the family is frequently overlooked by the international community even as the family faces new challenges to protection of the family, family formation and stability.

Policies and programs to achieve poverty eradication, in particular, suffer from a lack of attention to the family as a rights holder, a subject of policies and programming, as well as an agent of sustainable social and economic development.

Below are a several first order concerns the Commission for Social Development should entertain in elaborating strategies to eradicate poverty to achieve sustainable development for all.

Protecting the family is not only a matter of good policy, it is also an obligation under international law. The family is defined in international law and policy as “the natural and fundamental group unit of society.” As such, it is “entitled to protection by society and the State” and is a proper subject of human rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and binding international instruments reserve singular protections for the natural or nuclear family in recognition of the family’s irreplaceable role as “natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children.”

International law further establishes that the family is formed when a man and a woman exercise their fundamental human right to freely “marry and found a family”, and that they are entitled to equal rights in the context of marriage and the family.¹ This fundamental right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and binding international instruments. The self-evident truth of the benefit of the family to its individual members and society at large enshrined in international law is validated by the best available social science and research. Indeed, the social science and the data could not be clearer. Unless the family is empowered, poverty eradication will never be achieved and development will never be sustainable.

Children thrive in intact families formed by the marriage of a man and a woman. It is the place where individuals learn both love and responsibility. No other

¹ SEE WILLIAM A. SCHABAS, ED., THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: THE TRAVAUX PRÉPARATOIRES, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS (2013). THE FRAMERS OF THE UDHR ONLY MENTION MARRIAGE AND FAMILY FORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF DISCUSSIONS OF THE FAMILY AS NATURAL GROUP UNIT OF SOCIETY AND THE EXERCISE OF THE EQUAL RIGHT OF MEN AND WOMEN BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER MARRIAGE. WHILE UDHR 16 DOES NOT EXCLUDE THE FOUNDING OF A FAMILY OUTSIDE OF THE CONTEXT OF FORMALIZED MARRIAGE, IT DOES EXCLUDE THE FOUNDING OF A FAMILY WITHOUT THE FREE EXERCISE OF THE “RIGHT TO MARRY AND FOUND A FAMILY” BY A MAN AND A WOMAN, AS FOR EXAMPLE IN THE CASE OF FORCED MARRIAGES, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, OR RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS OF THE SAME SEX.

structure or institution is able to deliver the same quality outcomes for children as the family composed of a man and a woman in a stable and enduring relationship.²

Even schools that are home to strong and stable families also tend to enjoy more successful and gender-equitable schools.³

A host of negative outcomes result from family breakdown and deprivation.

Divorce or partnership dissolution and re-partnering are associated with higher levels of diarrhea, stunting (i.e., poor growth), and child mortality in a number of lower-income regions around the globe.⁴

When children are not brought up by their biological parents in a stable family environment, as for example in unmarried, cohabiting, and same-sex households, they are more likely to experience school failure, lower levels of education, behavioral problems, drug use, and loneliness, among other negative outcomes, as well as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.⁵

Growing up with both parents (in an intact family) is strongly associated with more education, work, and income. Both men and women enjoy substantially higher family incomes, compared to peers with otherwise similar characteristics. These advantages are replicated across the population spectrum in the United States, regardless of race or religion.⁶

Entering marriage and founding a family is associated with better physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, less criminality and substance abuse, and longer

² SEE REGNERUS M., "HOW DIFFERENT ARE THE ADULT CHILDREN OF PARENTS WHO HAVE SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS? FINDINGS FROM THE NEW FAMILY STRUCTURES STUDY". SOC SCI RES. 2012 JUL;41(4):752-70. FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH ARE ALSO OBSERVABLE AT THE WEBSITE: [HTTP://WWW.FAMILYSTRUCTURESTUDIES.COM](http://www.familystructurestudies.com).

³ SEE W. BRADFORD WILCOX AND NICHOLAS ZILL, STRONGER FAMILIES, BETTER SCHOOLS: FAMILIES AND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION ACROSS ARIZONA, INSTITUTE FOR FAMILY STUDIES (2016), AVAILABLE AT [HTTP://IFSTUDIES.ORG/STRONGER-FAMILIES-BETTER-SCHOOLS-ARIZONA/](http://ifstudies.org/stronger-families-better-schools-arizona/).

⁴ SEE WORLD FAMILY MAP 2014, AN INTERNATIONAL REPORT FROM CHILD TRENDS (2014), AVAILABLE AT [HTTP://WORLDfamily.ORG/2014/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2014/06/WFM-2014-FINAL_FORWEB.PDF](http://worldfamily.org/2014/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WFM-2014-FINAL_FORWEB.PDF).

⁵ SEE IBID. REGNERUS, M.; SEE ALSO SULLINS, DONALD PAUL, "EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS AMONG CHILDREN WITH SAME-SEX PARENTS: DIFFERENCE BY DEFINITION" (JANUARY 25, 2015). BRITISH JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, SOCIETY AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE 7(2):99-120, 2015. AVAILABLE AT SSRN: [HTTP://SSRN.COM/ABSTRACT=2500537](http://ssrn.com/abstract=2500537); SEE ALSO SULLINS, DONALD PAUL, "CHILD ATTENTION-DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD) IN SAME-SEX PARENT FAMILIES IN THE UNITED STATES: PREVALENCE AND COMORBIDITIES" (JANUARY 21, 2015). BRITISH JOURNAL OF MEDICINE & MEDICAL RESEARCH 6(10): 987-998, 2015, ARTICLE NO. BJMMR.2015.275, ISSN: 2231-061. AVAILABLE AT SSRN: [HTTP://SSRN.COM/ABSTRACT=2558745](http://ssrn.com/abstract=2558745); D. PAUL SULLINS, "INVISIBLE VICTIMS: DELAYED ONSET DEPRESSION AMONG ADULTS WITH SAME-SEX PARENTS," DEPRESSION RESEARCH AND TREATMENT, VOL. 2016, ARTICLE ID 2410392, 8 PAGES, 2016. DOI:10.1155/2016/2410392, AVAILABLE AT [HTTPS://WWW.HINDAWI.COM/JOURNALS/DRT/2016/2410392/CTA/](https://www.hindawi.com/journals/drt/2016/2410392/cta/).

⁶ (W. BRADFORD WILCOX, ROBERT I. LERMAN, FOR RICHER, FOR POORER: HOW FAMILY STRUCTURES ECONOMIC SUCCESS IN AMERICA, AEI AND INSTITUTE FOR FAMILY STUDIES (2014), AVAILABLE AT: [HTTPS://WWW.AEI.ORG/PUBLICATION/FOR-RICHER-FOR-POORER-HOW-FAMILY-STRUCTURES-ECONOMIC-SUCCESS-IN-AMERICA/](https://www.aei.org/publication/for-richer-for-poorer-how-family-structures-economic-success-in-america/)).

life expectancies for both men and women. It is also positively correlated with lower infant mortality. Moreover, research shows that healthy families formed by the union of a man and a woman result in more healthy families. While individuals who do not experience the benefits of being raised by their mother and father can rise above their circumstances, children born in families that stay together are more likely to form their own families.⁷

It simply cannot be overstated. The family is essential in combating poverty and creating economic opportunity. Entering marriage and founding a family is correlated with higher earnings and social mobility. When the family breaks down new generations and entire social strata become trapped in the cycle of poverty.⁸

A landmark Harvard study shows the best predictor of social mobility in the United States is the family. The most consistent factor in the ability of individuals to emerge from poverty and climb the social ladder is living in areas where families stay together.⁹

Moreover, the economic synergies found naturally in families are impossible to recreate through government programs or institutions. Even aside from the direct social and economic costs of family breakdown because of its effect on children and parents outlined above, the breakup of the family results in exponentially higher expenses for governments through welfare programs to care for children and youth who do not benefit from an intact family, as well as adults and elderly persons whose only safety net is found in the public purse.

The benefits of the family for individuals and communities are repeated across borders and all segments of society regardless of social and economic status, including among minorities.¹⁰

Recent pressure to grant international status and recognition to social and legal arrangements between individuals of the same sex in the context of the United Nations has led to unnecessary confusion and acrimony in international negotiations on the subject of the family. Unfortunately, this has led to the exclusion of the family altogether from recent debates in the General Assembly, as member states do not recognize relations between individuals of the same sex as capable of constituting a family.

⁷ SEE WILCOX ET. AL, WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS, THIRTY CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, INSTITUTE FOR AMERICAN VALUES NEW YORK, 2011, AVAILABLE AT: [HTTP://WWW.BREAKINGTHESPIRALOFSILENCE.COM/DOWNLOADS/WHY_MARRIAGE_MATTERS.PDF](http://WWW.BREAKINGTHESPIRALOFSILENCE.COM/DOWNLOADS/WHY_MARRIAGE_MATTERS.PDF).

⁸ WILCOX ET. AL, IBID.

⁹ SEE CHETTY, RAJ AND HENDREN, NATHANIEL AND KLINE, PATRICK AN SAEZ EMNUEL, WHERE IS THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY? THE GEOGRAPHY OF INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES, JANUARY 2014. NBER WORKING PAPER NO. W19843. FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH ARE ALSO OBSERVABLE AT THE WEBSITE: [HTTP://WWW.EQUALITY-OF-OPPORTUNITY.ORG](http://WWW.EQUALITY-OF-OPPORTUNITY.ORG).

¹⁰ SEE FERNANDO PLIEGO CARRASCO, TIPOS DE FAMILIA Y BIENESTAR DE NIÑOS Y ADULTOS: EL DEBATE CULTURAL DEL SIGLO XXI EN 13 PAÍSES DEMOCRÁTICOS, UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO, INSTITUTO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIALES 2013. FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH ARE ALSO OBSERVABLE AT THE WEBSITE: [HTTP://WWW.TIPOSDEFAMILIA.COM/LIBRO](http://WWW.TIPOSDEFAMILIA.COM/LIBRO).

This position statement and explanatory notes reflect the position of “The Family Articles,” the platform of Civil Society for the Family, a coalition of over 180 pro-family organizations that wants the international community to protect the family in accordance with binding international human rights obligations.¹¹

The coalition is attempting to constructively move the debate beyond the current impasse to a more fruitful approach that will recognize the importance of the family for all individuals and society at large as a rights holder, an agent of sustainable social and economic development, and a proper subject of international programs and policies.

¹¹ SEE “THE FAMILY ARTICLES” AND EXPLANATORY NOTES, AVAILABLE AT WWW.CIVILSOCIETYFORTHEFAMILY.ORG.