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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: “Fostering social development and social
justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the
implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty
eradication”.

Statement submitted by **C-Fam, Inc.**, 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 first Sustainable Development Goal calls for “an end to poverty in all its manifestations by 2030.” As that phrase indicates, poverty takes many forms, and not all of them can be expressed in terms of a lack of financial resources. There are other forms of poverty that exist even among relatively affluent individuals and groups, yet are insidious and detrimental to human flourishing.

St Teresa of Kolkata, popularly known as Mother Teresa, served the poorest of the poor in her community in India, yet when she spoke about poverty at the United Nations and during her visits to other countries, she warned of the corrosive effects of poverties other than financial destitution. She said that “the poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty,” and that the remedy for this kind of poverty must begin “in our own homes.”

This year, the Commission for Social Development is also commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. Since its founding, the United Nations has recognized the importance of the family, which is defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the “natural and fundamental group unit of society,” and which is “entitled to protection by society and the State.” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights further predicates family formation as the result of the exercise of the right of men and women to marry and found a family in a complementary and equal relationship.

In view of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the General Assembly decided that the major activities for the observance of the Year should be concentrated at the local regional and national levels and assisted by the United Nations and its system of organizations, with a view to creating among Governments policy-makers and the public “a greater awareness of the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society.” Member states should recommit to this goal on the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year

Any attempt to eradicate poverty through social policies intended to foster social development and social justice will fail if it is not undertaken with the natural and fundamental group unit of society at its center. Moreover, the family is not merely a natural aspect of human society, but a source of protection, the nurturing of children, mutual support, and vital human connection. When families break down or fail to form, leaving individuals isolated, societies suffer, poverty increases, and antisocial behaviour escalates. Laws and policies enacted by the state can either strengthen families and incentivize their formation or do the opposite, to the detriment of all.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of social isolation and loneliness were keenly felt, including by relatively wealthy people in highly developed countries, leading to increased mental health problems and substance abuse. The closure of schools and businesses exerted financial strains on households, with those led by single parents particularly acutely affected.

Strong and stable families are a force-multiplier for healthy societies and nations. By sharing resources and providing mutual support, members of intact families require fewer services and subsidies from the state, freeing them to be used on behalf of those experiencing greater precarity. Numerous social science studies have documented the benefits of marriage to the mental and physical health of both men and women, and those of being raised by their own biological and married parents to children. Strong families raise healthy, well-adjusted, and well-educated children who will go on to be productive members of society and ultimately form strong families of their own.

To prevent and respond to the various manifestations of poverty that exist throughout the world, social policies should be oriented to a) support family formation and stability, and b) provide a safety net to ensure that those without the full support and protection of family are not left behind. To achieve this, care must be taken to ensure that the modalities for accessing assistance from the State do not create perverse incentives against marriage or parenthood.

Since the family is entitled to protection by society and the State, multilateral organizations also play a role in ensuring that protection is fostered and not impeded. It is therefore concerning that longstanding agreed language on the family, including from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has recently faced pushback in negotiations between UN member States, and that the very definition of the family has been called into question.

While it is true that people live in a wide variety of household arrangements, and that their individual dignity and rights must be recognized and upheld regardless of their household structure, it is not the case that all household types are associated with the same outcomes for their members, particularly children, who fare best when they are raised in stable families by their own, married parents.

The family, as traditionally understood and defined in international agreements, is an essential force for preventing and mitigating poverty in all of its manifestations, financial and otherwise. We therefore urge the Commission for Social Development to encourage member states to adopt and maintain laws and policies that encourage family formation and stability. To that end, it is also important that the family not be redefined, as its place in international consensus is not merely descriptive, but prescriptive: there is no imperative for international institutions or the state to encourage or protect all household arrangements. Recognition that people live in diverse household arrangements for descriptive reasons does not require the redefinition of the family from its traditionally-understood meaning.

Social development, social protection, and social justice can only be achieved when societies are healthy and functioning well, which can only happen when the natural and fundamental group unit of society—the family—is fostered and supported, to the benefit of all its members.
