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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 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.



Statement

At the heart of social development lies the natural institution of the family

Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world while keeping in mind the post-2015 development agenda must begin with identifying those core drivers of social development that are unchanging, permanent and essential for sustainable social development in all societies. One such core driver of development is the family founded on the union of a man and woman. Without the family, social development is simply not possible.

States have a compelling moral and social interest in protecting and promoting the family. Without the family, societies cannot exist, let alone develop in any form. As the Human Rights Council recently emphasized in its resolution 26/11, “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society” and the “natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members”.

In article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it is declared that the family is “the natural and fundamental group unit of society” and that it is “entitled to protection by society and the State”. More than 120 countries have constitutional provisions that echo this article, as well as innumerable legal and policy provisions that flesh it out.

The family contributes more than any other social institution to social integration, productive employment and the eradication of poverty in all its dimensions, both social and economic. The family is above all the safest place to safeguard the human rights of individuals from their earliest years.

This self-evident truth is confirmed and validated by recent science and research. No other structure or institution is able to deliver the same quality of outcomes for children. 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.

The family benefits all its members. Entering marriage and founding a family is associated with better health, greater happiness and longer life expectancies for both men and women. It is also positively correlated with lower infant mortality.

The family is essential in combating poverty and creating wealth. The economic synergies found naturally in families are impossible to recreate through government programmes or institutions. The break-up of the family results in exponentially higher expenses for Governments through welfare programmes. A groundbreaking study of factors that contribute to economic mobility in America, published by Harvard economist Raj Chetty in 2014, found that family structure was the most likely predictor of economic mobility.

Strong, stable families are necessary for social development to be sustainable. Research shows that healthy families formed by the union of a man and a woman result in more healthy families. Children of broken families or alternative household arrangements do not experience the benefits of being raised by a mother and father. While individuals in broken families can rise above their circumstances, children born in families that stay together are more likely to form their own families.

Laws and policies that incentivize a man and a woman to enter into marriage and form a family, as well as laws that strengthen and protect marriage, are the principal way in which protection of the family finds expression in domestic legal systems.

The definition of family enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the family formed as the fruit of the union of a man and a woman. It has always encompassed extended family relationships and single parenting, but does not contemplate homosexual unions. Only a few developed countries have changed their laws to recognize homosexual unions in law, yet they argue this requires a change to the universal, longstanding definition of family. Some even say that the family has no human rights at all.

Recognizing homosexual couples or other household arrangements as equivalent to the family would result in societies not only accepting but promoting homosexual relations, promiscuity and other immoral practices. In the few places where “homosexual marriage” is sanctioned by the law, children are taught from an early age that homosexuality is healthy, homosexuals are allowed to adopt and Governments pressure all to accept homosexual lifestyles as normal.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights requires all children to receive protection regardless of their family situation. It recognizes as much in its article 25, which states that “all children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection”.

Children must be afforded the same rights as other children regardless of the circumstances and conditions in which they were conceived or live, or the choices of their parents. Ensuring that all children have the same protections, however, does not require States to legitimize or incentivize household arrangements that are not equivalent to the family.

Recognizing the rights of children does not mean that individuals who cohabit with a partner have a special right to receive legal benefits and protections afforded to the family simply by virtue of their choice to live within the same household. This distinction is especially important in the light of research that shows how children do best when they are raised by their biological parents in a stable family relationship. While States have a responsibility to help children who may be at a disadvantage in this regard, they have no obligation or interest in incentivizing relationships other than marriage between a man and a woman.

Societies will not benefit from promoting and endorsing household arrangements that can be harmful to children. In fact, legitimizing and incentivizing alternate household arrangements for the upbringing of children, outside of and even in preference to the family founded upon the union of a man and a woman, can violate the human rights of children.

Children in unmarried, cohabiting households are exposed to a higher likelihood of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Children are markedly more likely to be physically, sexually and emotionally abused when they are not brought up by their biological parents in a stable family environment.

Children who are not brought up by a mother and a father in a stable family environment are more likely to suffer from school failure, behavioural problems,

drug use and loneliness, among other negative outcomes that affect their productivity and ability to contribute positively to society.

In the contemporary world the family faces new challenges and opportunities

There is evidence that the family is in crisis in societies everywhere around the world. Beset by threats to its stability and continuity, including the world economic situation, the family faces challenges never before imagined. Many young people are unable to realize their right and dreams to form a family. Socioeconomic obstacles make forming a family virtually impossible for many. Even more troubling, some societies have devalued the family in recent decades, created negative stereotypes about family life and stripped the family of its human rights, treating it as an obstacle to new harmful social policies that exalt individualism at the expense of the family.

On the other hand, there are bright prospects for the family. Many countries show renewed interest in designing policies that will positively affect families and family formation. There has also been a significant level of activity within the United Nations around the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014. The family has been the focus of several intergovernmental negotiations within the Commission for Social Development, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. This is a positive development that must extend to the review of the World Summit on Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, and the agreement on the post-2015 development agenda.

The year 2015 marks the twentieth anniversary of the World Summit and will be an opportunity for more than a cursory revision of social policies in the light of new political ideas, like the notion of green jobs and the green economy.

The impending agreement on the post-2015 development agenda in particular demands a thorough review of current social policies, in the light of the results they have actually achieved. Protection of the family must be at the centre of all efforts aimed at social development.
