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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, 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 Family, Social Development, and Agenda 2030

There is an urgent need to re-orient international policy towards strengthening and protecting the family. Rethinking social development in the 2030 era of sustainable development must begin and end with the family. Only by doing so can sustainable development, in all its dimensions — social, economic, and environmental — become a reality. Sadly, the Sustainable Development Goals and the summit outcome “Transforming Our World” that launched the 2030 era of sustainable development ignores the family as a subject of rights and an essential vehicle to promote sustainable development. We are troubled by this omission. The family is uniquely suited as a vehicle to promote the social and economic wellbeing of its members as well as society at large, within a framework of sustainability, and thereby fulfil their human rights in the social and economic sphere while respecting nature and the environment.

Rightly, Human Rights Council resolutions most recently, and resolutions adopted in recent years by the Commission on Social Development, reaffirmed that “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”, following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

This self-evident truth of the benefit of the family to its individual members and society at large is confirmed and validated by the best available science and research. No other structure or institution is able to deliver the same quality outcomes as the family composed of a man and a woman in a stable and enduring relationship. The benefits of the family for individuals and communities are repeated across borders and in all social and economic groupings, including minorities.

The family can help individuals, families, and society more widely, to attain increased social mobility, wealth creation, better physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, less criminality and substance abuse, longer life expectancies, less infant mortality, among other positive outcomes. A host of negative outcomes result from family breakdown. The family is also essential to eradicating poverty and creating economic opportunity. 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.

States have a compelling duty to protect and assist the family. Without the family, societies cannot exist, let alone develop. International law obligations of States under UN treaties with regard to the family are well established and recognize the important link between the family and social development.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the family as “the natural and fundamental group unit of society” and declares that it is “entitled to protection by society and the State” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16). It recognizes the formation of a family as resulting from the union of a man and a woman in marriage (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 23.1) and the International Covenant on

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (International Covenant on Civil and Political Right, Article 0.1) also reflect the UDHR verbatim.

More recently, the most widely ratified human rights treaty, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, reaffirmed how “the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community”.

States have an obligation and moral duty to create legal, social, and economic environment conducive to family formation and stability, as was recognized at the Copenhagen Conference on Social Development ([A/CONF.166/9](#), paragraph 39). Sadly, this important consensus and the human rights that underpin it are undermined by old and new threats to the family and its members.

Harmful practices such as child and forced marriage continue to violate the human rights of men and women to enter into marriage freely, and threaten the lives of children. Economic conditions frequently make family formation a remote dream for millions of men and women. Violations of these rights also arise in the context of migration.

New threats include removal of all safeguards for family stability that were always intended to protect the most vulnerable members of society, children. Laws surrounding the dissolution of marriage for no reason at all are of increasing concern to scholars who understand the importance of the family for the wellbeing and development of children and social development more broadly.

New legal arrangements between adults, such as same-sex relationships, violate and obstruct the right of children to know and be cared for by their parents. In addition, new reproductive technologies undermine this right. Families are penalized for their traditions, religious and cultural beliefs when they attempt to opt children out of state-run education, or of specific classes such as sex education that promotes and/or legitimizes early sexualisation, homosexuality, and gender ideology.

In light of these troubling events in our time rethinking social development, beginning and ending with the family, is an urgent priority.

Unfortunately, debates about the family and how international policy should understand the family are preventing member states from including, let alone mainstreaming, the family in international policy. This is a scandal that undermines the credibility of the United Nations as an important tool to promote social development.

Some say the family as it has always been understood in international policy discriminates against children who find themselves in same-sex households. This is disingenuous.

Only a few countries have changed their laws to recognize a special status for homosexual relationships, yet they argue this requires a change to the universal, longstanding understanding of family for all member states and international policy.

Moreover, validating the choices of adults to live in same-sex unions, or other arrangements, as equivalent to the family is not necessary to protect children from discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several human

rights treaties already protect the rights of children deprived of a family to receive the benefits afforded to all children under the law.

While agreement could not be reached on how the family squares in the new development agenda, countries must recognize that family policy, for the reasons outlined above, will be essential to realize the Sustainable Development Goals, all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the eradication of poverty. By placing the family at the center of the social policy debate in the international community, this commission can contribute to achieving this task.

Rethinking social development must begin and end by placing the family back into the social development equation in order to maximize the contribution of the family to realizing Agenda 2030 in all its aspects — social, economic and environmental.
