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### **Statement submitted by The International Federation for Family Development, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Since 2017, the General Assembly Resolution on the Follow-up to the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond has incorporated recommendations to empower families around the globe. One of those innovative additions has been the focus on parents as the crucial link for intergenerational relations and a vital reference for child development. Although, this novel perspective has called for action to elaborate on the role of parents in society and their need for support while fulfilling their important task. Terms as parenting education, positive parenting and parental care are in need of deep analysis and interpretation.

To this end, family-oriented organizations have launched several initiatives to raise awareness of the importance of family policies as a crucial mean to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With a consultative status with the United Nations and an evidence-based strategy the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) and the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) have promoted various Conferences, Summits, Meetings and Events to in order to enrich the content of the international agreed language and facilitate its comprehension and support among Member States, Civil Society, Private Sector, UN-System and other stakeholders.

Up until today, DIFI has held an International Conference titled “Parenting, Child Wellbeing, and Development” in collaboration with UNICEF Middle East and North Africa on the 23–24 October 2018. Later on, an Expert Group Meeting was held on “The Role of Families and Family Policy in Supporting Youth Transitions” (11–12 December 2018) and organized by DIFI, in collaboration with the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DISD UN DESA) and IFFD.

More recently, a Civil Society Statement on Parenting was launched during the 53rd Session of the Commission on Social Development at the United Nations Headquarters New York. The Statement was signed by 10 International Organizations with a global reach. Also, a side event on “Positive Parenting and Social Inclusion” took place during the 52nd Session of the Commission on Population and Development at the United Nations Headquarters New York. It was organized by IFFD and sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Malaysia, Qatar, Italy and Ghana with the collaboration of UN DESA, UNICEF, UNDP and the Brazilian Government.

These events have analysed this dimension and showed the need for more research and exchange of good practices. We are committed to help in designing parents skills formation curriculum with findings and conclusions from these initiatives. In this particular regard, parents are key to ensure empowerment, inclusiveness and equality for the generations to come.

### *The role of parenting education in helping parents to support youth transitions: Family Expectations and Aspirations*

The expert group meeting explored the role of the family in supporting youth transitions and on influencing their decisions, with a focus on family networks and family expectations and aspirations. Participants launched this discussion off by questioning what is meant by transitions to adulthood today. They explained that youth transitions are not linear, and that youth increasingly live in a post-materialist and post-modernist world. They explained that youth tend to delay the age they leave their parents household. Families are considered to be a safe space to support youth outcomes, their identity is constructed through family, and relationships tend to take on the role of the state, among others. They concluded by drawing attention to the

consequences of this trend including a delay in emancipation, as well as a delay in marriage and childbearing.

Moreover, they explored the barriers to youth transition to adulthood, and the role of families during this transition. They explained that, in some regions, youth are increasingly facing high unemployment due to a demographic wave that has created a youth bulge, weak education systems, lack of career planning for students, leaving schools without the skills needed for work, economic barriers facing women including discrimination and social norms, among others. This has led to an increase in migration, as well as entry into the informal market economy. In response, families have been a key resource for youth in some regions.

Experts also showed that families affect youth employment using educational support (in terms of family advice, enabling access to opportunities, and pushing women to work in certain fields over others), enabling job searches (through family network support), and employment support (in which families have specific expectations of their youth to work in certain fields and for specific wages, among others). Although research has shown that families have the biggest roles in helping youth attain jobs, further inquiry is needed on the role of families on youth transitions.

Regional experts highlighted the benefits of national transfer accounts that explore the relationships between individuals that have economic support to give (parents or families) and those that receive it (youth). These transfers include health, economic, educational and tax resources. They illustrated that the intergenerational resource allocation across time is affected by the socioeconomic context, including families and societies. Overall, this method is significant as it provides useful information on the economic life cycle across generations.

At the same time, others explained that one issue facing some youths' transitions to adulthood is their lack of agency or power of choice. They noted that socioeconomic factors affect youths' power of choice. These choices are also affected by parents' influence. The recommendation implied the strengthening of career counsellors, families, communities and a selection of academic courses in order to support young people's abilities and choices at the macro level.

Lastly, the need to align the expectations of parents with the abilities of youth were explored. In many places, families have a large impact on the lives of youth and their choices in the field of education, jobs and partners. Parents have high expectations for their children to have better opportunities than they had, for example, in terms of moving from a rural to an urban environment. Parental expectations must match the needs of globalization today and the educational system needs not to merely provide knowledge but also enough skills for youth to utilize in their jobs. Therefore, it is essential to create spaces that strengthen the capacities of young people, and overall, to localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### *Parenting and Family Structures*

During the expert group meeting, the role of family was explored while supporting youth transitions and on influencing youth decisions, with a focus on parenting and family structures.

The experts outlined the major parental factors that influence youth transitions, namely, the socio-ecological context, and the threats of intergenerational poverty. They additionally highlighted the following considerations for the adoption of youth policies: promoting resilience, using a holistic approach that focuses on many skills and competencies, promoting integrated services while maintaining a community focus, utilizing a developmental focus, reaching the isolated, building on youths' strengths and promoting sustainability.

They also provided an examination of the type of policies required for families in some countries to support youth transitions. Youth transitions should be a concern for families because investing in youth leads to a return for their own families. As such, whether parenting education could empower youth is still a pending question mainly because it requires a clear understanding of the criteria that make up youths' transitions, whether they are categorized by work, marriage or among others. Thus, the necessity to engage families in social policy design was highlighted.

The role of parents was also discussed in their support of youth transitions. The experts prefaced the discussion by outlining the main challenges facing youth in some regions, including delinquency, violence, drugs, substance abuse, unemployment, among others. The discussion highlighted the lack of research that examines the relationship between parents and youth, and its impact on youth choices is lacking. There are two dimensions to youth choices, including independence and vocational functioning. Research showed that although gender did not affect the support provided by parents to their youth, age was a strong factor that affected youth autonomy. As such, the need for a relational perspective to understand the general characteristics of youth and their decisions were highlighted, to conclude by noting that public policy could reinforce relationships that support youth autonomy, and vocational functioning.

Finally, they stressed the importance of quality parenting to the wellbeing of youth and their transitions to adulthood. Main trends currently affecting parenting in many regions include the late formation of families, non-traditional marriages, limited involvement of parents in schooling, harsh discipline, as well as high screen time, high substance abuse, high rates of obesity, and the use of nannies and domestic help to care for children. In response, social protection programs that support access to education for children, including conditional cash transfers are needed, as well as other social policies that support family formation, parenting and the empowerment of children, all of them requiring quality parenting.

#### *Family Policy Recommendations*

1. Engage families in public policies that target youth and strengthen family relations as they are a strong factor in youth successful transition.
2. Change the narrative from a discussion on family to how families can support the enjoyment of individual human rights: family should be considered as an incubator for individual rights and free choices of young people particularly in decisions related to their bodies, emotions, and networks.
3. Promote general principles of the value and importance of families in the lives of young people and an integrated whole family approach providing the most effective and efficient support for families and young people.
4. Invest in family policies that focus primarily on assistance, especially for those with young children, in poverty, ethnic minorities and migrant families.
5. Provide support for building competencies and socioeconomic learning, mentoring and experience learning; including parenting of parents, eliminate or reduce risk, improve communities – invest in infrastructure to provide proper services and education for proper services.
6. Strengthen career counselling facilities aimed at improving the capacity of families and communities to offer appropriate guidance on career choice and selection of courses of study.
7. Invest in parenting education to provide skills for the family.

8. Provide incentives to reinforce parental autonomy, and to prevent various parental behaviours.
  9. Invest in public policies that support family formation, parenting, and the empowerment of families by providing:
    - (a) Single parent cash benefits
    - (b) Social insurance benefits targeting among others divorced (non-remarried) women families without a breadwinner, abandoned wives and widows (all without insufficient income)
    - (c) Housing allowances, cash bonuses and subsidized wedding venues, dowry waivers
    - (d) Grants to newborn children, nutrition assistance and food vouchers
    - (e) Day-care centers or choice between cash-for-care benefits and day-care
    - (f) Labour legislation (maternity/paternity leave; award schemes at work)
    - (g) Tax breaks/allowances for parents
    - (h) Educational campaigns (including media, school meetings)
    - (i) Universal or targeted home visits including health and development checks, counselling and education), positive impacts on quality of parenting, regular screening to monitor child development and anticipatory guidance
    - (j) Helplines and other community resources (including counselling (premarital, pre- and post-natal, etc.))
  10. Support the integration and coordination of efforts of families, schools and communities
  11. Provide social protection for families with youth and new families (high-quality education)
  12. Invest in care services
  13. Expand maternity and paternity leaves
  14. Promote parent support groups to share information about parenting and child development; parent engagement into school activities (meeting teachers, learning education techniques, goal setting and establishing routines ...); counselling, education and coaching to address specific issues.
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