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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Asociación HazteOir.org, Association of United Families International, C-Fam, Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, and Universal Peace Federation, non-governmental organizations 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

At the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, its convergence with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations brings to the forefront the key principles memorialized soon after its founding in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Eleanor Roosevelt prophetically hoped would become “the international Magna Carta” of all people everywhere. Proclaiming “the inherent dignity” and “equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family,” including “the equal rights of men and women,” the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action enumerates, *inter alia*, the right to live free from slavery, torture, and degrading treatment, the right to own property, the right to receive equal pay for equal work, and the right to be educated” – rights all too often denied to women around the world.

But the urgent work of protecting such rights for women must proceed in a way that does not unintentionally undermine the most important of their “equal and inalienable rights” by failing to recognize the God-given uniqueness of woman and man and of their marital union to form what the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognizes as society’s “natural and fundamental group unit,” namely, the family. Referring to this divinely ordained union, Pope Francis has spoken of “the complementarity between man and woman,” which “lies at the foundation of marriage and the family.” Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child’s growth and emotional development. This “union of man and woman in marriage,” he continues, is “a unique, natural, fundamental, and beautiful good for people, families, communities and societies.”

It is also the greatest guarantor of human rights for both women and men. In the words of Michael Novak, former ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, “(t)he family is the seedbed of economic skills, money habits, attitudes toward work, and the arts of financial independence. The family is a stronger agency of educational success than the school. The family is a stronger teacher of the religious imagination than the church. Political and social planning in a wise social order begins with the axiom, ‘(w)hat strengthens the family strengthens society.’ The roles of a father and a mother, and of children with respect to them, is the absolutely critical center of social force.”

As the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women proceeds with its important work of protecting women’s rights, we urge delegates to do so in the most effective manner possible by fulfilling their obligation undertaken in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights calling for, “the widest possible protection and assistance” to “be accorded to the family.”