

Introduction to the debate about Amoris Laetitia

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María Lía Zervino, *Servidora*
WUCWO Secretary General

During his visit to the UN General Assembly in September 2015, on behalf of the Holy See and of the Catholic Church throughout the world, Pope Francis acknowledged and thanked the United Nations, for several achievements such as the “development of international law, the establishment of international norms regarding human rights, advances in humanitarian law, the resolution of numerous conflicts, operations of peace-keeping and reconciliation”¹.

On behalf of the Forum of Catholic-Inspired NGOs-Geneva and in particular of the Working Group on the Family it is a great honour for me to introduce this debate on the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, and thus I join my voice to all those who express appreciation and gratitude to Pope Francis and to all those who work towards the objectives that we hold in common with the United Nations.

The NGO which I serve as Secretary General, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) - has been in existence for 106 years. It has more than 100 member organisations from 60 countries; it has ECOSOC Consultative Status, attends meetings of many other international- agencies and works towards dignity and leadership of women. WUCWO is coordinating one of the working groups, devoted to family issues, of the Geneva Forum. The Working Group on the Family also includes: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Association Points-Coeur, Caritas Internationalis, Caritas in Veritate Foundation and Dominicans for Justice and Peace.

The Forum includes approximately 25 NGOs accredited to ECOSOC. We try to work in synergy among our respective organisations and in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the UN in Geneva, in order to promote respect for and adherence to human rights. We work for the common good and the protection of human rights for all because every human being has an inherent and fundamental dignity that comes from its creation in the image and likeness of God.

¹ Pope Francis, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 25 September 2015.

For men and women to escape from extreme poverty and enter into the virtuous circle of sustainable development, it is essential to protect the rights of families to housing, decent work and land ownership as well as religious freedom, right of the family to educate its children, and other civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights².

The participant organisations of the Working Group have cooperated for more than a year with the overall aim to promote policies that protect and encourage family life. We were engaged in the drafting of the Human Rights Council resolution A / HRC / 29 / L.25, in July 2015, we contributed to the report of the High Commissioner and we presented oral and written statements focused on this same issue. Our involvement is based on our specific experiences in the field. We strive to demonstrate how best to help families in need, such as refugees families, those marginalized through poverty, those lacking training, those affected by unemployment, those with disabled members, among others. We wish to highlight good practices of work with families, with an empirical base, through ongoing and concrete projects of our daily real life experience.

As is the approach of many UN Agencies, as well as of most of our Catholic-inspired organisations, the method proposed by Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* is "empirical", "inductive" and "contextual". The reflections shared at the Synod of Bishops, which formed the basis of the Pope's "Exhortation" captured what was happening among families in various contexts in which the Church is present, then turned to Catholic doctrine to understand and propose concrete actions to support and accompany families encouraging them to contribute to the common good of their own members and others in their local communities.

This method is based on listening and dialogue through which the Catholic Church deepens its familiarity with all people living in the modern world while also hopefully contributing to the promotion of truly human values in this same world.

Before ending, I particularly want to thank His Excellency Mons. Jurkovič for organising this event and also His Excellency Mons. Paglia for the patronage of the Pontifical Council for the Family to the presentation of the "Exhortation" we co-organised last April in Rome for a hundred ambassadors and representatives to the Holy See.

Now, we have come here to listen, to learn and to contribute. Thank you very much to all of you and I look forward to a fruitful debate!

² Cfr. Idem.