

Protection of the Family and Its Members

Joint Statement at the 27th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council (September 2014) - Panel Discussion on the Protection of the Family and Its Members, submitted by Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities) and subsequently affirmed by Association Points-Coeur, Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Caritas in Veritate Foundation, Company of the Daughters of Charity of Vincent of Paul, Edmund Rice International, International Association of Charities, International Catholic Child Bureau, International Institute of Mary Our Help of the Salesians Sisters of Don Bosco IIMA, New Humanity, Pax Romana (International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs and International Movement of Catholic Students), VIDES International (International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education, Development), and World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations.

Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities), Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, the Caritas in Veritate Foundation, the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Vincent de Paul, Edmund Rice International, International Association of Charities, International Catholic Child Bureau, International Institute of Mary Our Help of the Salesians Sisters of Don Bosco IIMA, New Humanity, Pax Romana (International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs and International Movement of Catholic Students), VIDES International (International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education, Development), and the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations welcome the Resolution A/HRC/26/11 on the Protection of the Family, particularly in view of the central role of this institution as *"the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of all its members and particularly children"*¹. The spirit of the Resolution proclaiming this fact echoes the words of Pope Francis, *"the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another."*²

It is true that today's families are burdened by many social and cultural challenges, including:

- Domestic and external violence;
- The global economic crisis and its resultant structural poverty for increasing numbers of families throughout the world;
- Long-term unemployment;
- Migration for economic survival or to seek refuge due to threats on the lives or wellbeing of family members;
- Chronic or life-threatening illnesses; and
- Exploitation of minors for sexual abuse or forced labor.

Despite these serious challenges, the family has been and remains a source of strength and security for its own members. For this reason, the co-signers find it most regrettable that many States and some United Nations agencies portray this key social institution more as a "problem" than as a resource. The fact is that the family is a source of wealth, an irreplaceable good for children, an indispensable and vital foundation for society a whole and for local communities.

The Panel Discussion on the Protection of the Family and Its Members has the opportunity to address the implementation of States' obligations in protecting the family and its members. Moreover, it gives an opportunity to *"refocus on the role of families in development; take stock of recent trends in family policy development; share good practices in family policy making; review challenges faced by families worldwide and recommend solutions"*³.

¹ Resolution A/HRC/26/11 adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council on June 25, 2014.

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, para. 66, November 24, 2013.

³ Message of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Economic and Social Council in occasion of the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, <http://undesadspd.org/Family/InternationalObservances/TwentiethAnniversaryofIYF2014.aspx>.

The importance of the family for the life and wellbeing of society entails a particular responsibility for national governments and international institutions. Since the family functions as a middle ground between the individual and society, "*families have the right to be able to rely on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities*"⁴. Many States, however, have failed to fulfil their responsibilities to adequately protect families, particularly in the case of those families that face serious difficulties. As a result of the economic crisis, for example, single parent families and those with more than two children are most susceptible to poverty⁵.

The co-signing organisations believe, therefore, that States must enact and implement "family-friendly" policies that recognize and promote the capacity of strong family bonds, the birthright of all humanity, to serve as a source of social capital and stability to the wider fabric of the universal human family.

However, equal importance should be given to the family unit itself and to all its members. The dignity and rights of each and every members of the family, from the child in the womb to the oldest or most frail relatives, should be affirmed, upheld, and guaranteed. Such protection of individual family members reaps wider social benefits in the community-at-large, which finds an innate and vital expression in the family.

The family comes first in the hearts of the world's people and continually exhibits much greater vigour than the many forces in today's society that try to threaten or even eliminate it. The co-signing organisations stand firm in their support of such vigour, and plan to constantly advocate for better protection and support of the family and all its members as the fundamental unit of society.

⁴ *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Article 9.

⁵ Caritas Europa, *Family Is A Fundamental Pillar of Social Welfare and Should Be Supported In Times of Crisis*, May 15, 2013.