

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY & UNICEF COMMEMORATIVE 5-YEAR FOLLOW-UP TO THE 2002 CHILD SUMMIT

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Report prepared by Thomas W. Jacobson

The United Nations General Assembly and UNICEF joined forces to host a special high-level commemorative five-year follow-up to the 2002 Child Summit. For three days, from December 11-13, 2007, more than 140 speakers delivered their official statements in the General Assembly hall. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon was in Bali but transmitted a message by video. H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, one child delegate, Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, and H.E. Mr. Dalius Čekuolis, President of the Economic and Social Council, and the Presidents of San Marino & Mali were the first to speak. Then, one after the other, deputy prime ministers, cabinet ministers, ambassadors and other senior government officials, as well as some youth, followed by a few NGOs, gave their statements until 9 p.m. the first two nights. One of the child representatives was from Namibia, and he spoke on behalf of the *Youth Forum* (37 boys and 56 girls, aged 11 to 18, representing 51 countries, handpicked to come to the UN for this event).

At the close of the event, the General Assembly adopted a six-paragraph *Declaration of the Commemorative High-Level Plenary* [document A/62/L.31], which was possibly the most non-controversial and non-problematic declaration or resolution pertaining to the family and children that the UNGA has adopted in decades. It contained no anti-family, sexual rights or pro-abortion language.

In most of the speeches, there was an extremely strong emphasis upon the rights of children and the “best interests of the child” as national and international policy. Additional common themes were:

- Protecting children and stopping violence against children
- Protecting children from exploitation, sexual exploitation and trafficking
- Reaffirming the Declaration and Plan of Action from the 2002 Child Summit
- Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols
- Eliminating poverty
- Child mortality (especially under age 5, but no mention of the millions aborted)
- HIV/AIDS
- Education

Because the family is the most basic and important unit for the well-being and healthy development of children, I’ve included below excerpts from the speeches which related to the family. The United States gave the most pro-family speech, many others gave strong pro-family messages as well, but the majority seems to have forgotten the important of the family.

Mr. Jacobson originally wrote this paper in 2007 when he was serving as Representative to the United Nations for Focus on the Family (U.S.A.), from 2001 to 2010.

UNITED STATES:

William O. Brisben, United States Representative to UNICEF

“(A)t least nine other countries – Bangladesh, Benin, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, and Tanzania – have reduced infant and child mortality by 20 to 40 per cent in just five to eight years. This has been accomplished even in the face of continued or worsening poverty....

“As stated in “A World Fit for Children,” “the **family** is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened.” **Families** are the first line of defense against many systemic ills that eventually spill into the national, regional, and international arenas. We believe that government ought to create the conditions that allow **strong and healthy families to thrive**. We encourage governments to recognize the unique and irreplaceable contribution of **mothers and fathers** to the lives of their children and to develop public policies that **strengthen healthy marriages** and, wherever possible, the **two-parent family**. We believe government policy should recognize that **every child has dignity and worth**, and therefore ought to support all children while intensifying efforts to strengthen the **family**.

“... Additionally, there are millions of children who have been orphaned or made increasingly vulnerable due to HIV/AIDS who must not be forgotten. Our care for these children must be multifaceted and comprehensive.

“... As we think about where UNICEF will go from here, it is clear that we all need to do more together around the issue of care for orphans and vulnerable children....” [official statement]

Observer for the HOLY SEE: *Archbishop Celestino Migliore*, recalling the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the “standard” for protecting children’s rights, said the 2002 special session reaffirmed the **family** as the basic unit of society, which provided the best environment for children to acquire knowledge and develop positive attitudes for becoming responsible citizens. It was in everyone’s interest to motivate parents to take responsibility for education. [UNGA daily summary report]

ARGENTINA: *Jorge Argüello* said that at the centre of social policies on children was a focus on the **family**. [UNGA daily summary report]

BAHAMAS, speaking also on behalf of the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY: *Claire L. Hepburn, Attorney General & Minister of Legal Affairs for the Bahamas*, said that “although our plans may be viewed by some as usurping parental authority, we nevertheless support ...” [author’s eyewitness report]

FINLAND: *Ilkka Oksala, State Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health*, said the favourable economic development had required active participation by all in the labour market with mothers and fathers working in equal numbers. Yet, it was questionable if the demands of the working life had increased too much from the point of view of the child. Indeed, one could say that **children had to compete with work for the right to spend time with their parents** – a situation in which **a family’s welfare did not always guarantee the actual well-being of that family’s children**. [UNGA daily summary report]

INDIA: H.E. Mr. Anil Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development – “(C)hildren ... comprise 42% of the country’s population; the largest child population in the world. ... No violence against children can be justified, and all violence against children can and must be prevented.” (no mention of family) [official statement]

IRAN: Mohammad Khazaei – “The human rights of children are not fully protected unless the **family** foundation to which they belong is protected and supported. ... **Family** is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. ... The primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children rests with the **family**.” [official statement]

ITALY: Rosy Bindi, Minister for Family Policies – Among other things, her country’s National Action Plan reaffirmed the centrality of a child’s or adolescent’s relationship with his or her **family**. ... Underlining the primary responsibility of the **family** in the protection, care, growth and development of girls and boys, she said that concept should be included in the current session’s final declaration. [UNGA daily summary report]

JAMAICA: Ambassador Raymond Wolfe – “A major priority of this Government is to ensure the transformation of child care and protection services ... from a system characterized by reliance on the old and traditional ‘child rescue’ model, to a new approach built on the **family** support model, with primary prevention taking center stage. The Child Development Agency ... (will endeavor to prevent) children from entering the traditional residential child care system by maintaining them in **families** or in a **family-oriented environment**” [official statement]

KUWAIT: Khalaf Bu Dhair said the **family**, as the first place where the human personality formed, was the core component of society and the most important pillar in achieving social welfare. His country was directing much of its resources and wealth to providing the best possible environment for children and women. ... Kuwait’s Constitution stipulated that the **family** was the core of society and protected motherhood and childhood under this umbrella. [UNGA daily summary report]

MEXICO: Cecilia Landerreche Gomez, Director, National System for the Integral Development of the Family, said the basis of addressing children’s needs started with the **family**. As a result, Mexico had streamlined its adoption processes to guarantee that adoption served the needs of the children. [UNGA daily summary report]

NETHERLANDS: Andre Rouvoet, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Youth and Families, said it was time that the **family** was fully recognized as the basic unit of society and, as such, was strengthened by the Government. A safe and healthy **family** life was of crucial importance for the well-being of children and society as a whole. In other words, “when the **family** flourishes, society will flourish”. He, therefore, wanted to set up easily accessible youth and **family** centres in every Dutch town. Of course, the Government ought to be reluctant to interfere in parenting matters. But when the physical, psychosocial or cognitive development of the child was endangered, the Government had not only the right, but the duty to intervene. [UNGA daily summary report]

PAKISTAN: *Shahida Jamil, Federal Minister for Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education* – “Recent research has proved that **marriage and family are irreplaceable institutions**; and that men, women and children achieve the **greatest happiness, health and well-being in stable and intact families**. The Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes responsibility of both **parents** and the **whole family** towards the well being and care of the child. Unfortunately, millions of children around the world are growing up without one or both of their **parents** due to poverty, disability, diseases, natural disasters and **family breakdown or divorce**. The welfare of children and the institution of the **family** are accorded a special place in Pakistan’s State policies and constitution as children have always been the focus of our attention.” [official statement]

QATAR: *Nassir Bin Abdel-Aziz Al-Nasser* – “It is not possible to talk about the child without talking about his/her **family**. The State of Qatar believes that the promotion of children’s rights depends on the realization of the rights and duties of the **family**, which is the basic and nuclear unit of society. As such, the **family** should be strengthened. (C)hildren cannot grow up without **family** ties. The **family** is the origin of the human instinct, well before that fact has been enshrined in international instruments.” [official statement]

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: *Vitaly Churkin* – Turning to the larger area of the **family**, he noted that the President had declared 2008 the year of the **family** to strengthen Russian families. [UNGA daily summary report]

SAUDI ARABIA: *Abdullatif Sallam* said children were the pillar of society and the hope of the future. ... The Saudi Constitution guaranteed the rights of children. The Government Statute stipulated that the **family** was the nucleus and that children were brought up to observe the Islamic faith and cherish their homeland. The **family** was of paramount importance. Orphans were raised in shelters and homes in accordance with Islamic values. [UNGA daily summary report]