

UN General Assembly Concludes International Year of Family with Renewed Support for Traditional Family

by Thomas W. Jacobson (2004)

December 6, 2004 was a good day at the United Nations for families all over the world, and hopefully marks a historic change in attitudes toward the family. The General Assembly concluded the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family with a half-day session during which Secretary General Kofi Annan and ambassadors or other government representatives delivered official statements on the family. The clear majority made pro-family statements, and passed a stand-alone resolution on the family that contained no language that could be construed to support same-sex unions or other agendas to redefine the family.¹ The bold statements and stand taken by the ambassadors – even over the strong objections of European and a few other nations, quoted later in this brief – appears to mark a positive change among the Member Nations of the United Nations, since predominantly anti-family perspectives have prevailed in UN meetings and policies for at least a quarter-century. Therefore, *the latest agreed language on the family at the United Nations, negotiated in the General Assembly itself, is pro-family and consistent with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).*

During 2004, an astounding 134 local, national, regional and international conferences were held in 34 countries, focusing on the family as “the natural and fundamental group unit of society” (UDHR, Art. 16.3) to find ways to strengthen this damaged yet irreplaceable institution. The conferences were funded and hosted by the private sector and governments. Ambassadors to the United Nations were aware of the global outpouring of support for the family, prompting the vast majority to pass the pro-family resolution.

The largest international conference for the family, the *World Congress of Families III*, was held in Mexico City, March 29-31, 2004. More than 3,300 delegates from 75 nations attended. Regional family conferences were held in Kuala Lumpur, *Malaysia* (October 11-13) for the Asia-Pacific; in Geneva, *Switzerland* (August 23-25) for Europe; and in Cotonou, *Benin* (July 27-28) for all African countries. The grand finale was the *Doha International Conference on the Family* held in Doha, Qatar (November 29-30). The *Mexico City Declaration* and the *Doha Declaration* were issued at the conclusion of the respective conferences.²

Kofi Annan Makes Some Surprising Statements Favorable Toward Family

Despite the anti-family sentiment that seems to prevail at the United Nations, Secretary General Kofi Annan,³ during the opening period of the General Assembly’s special session, said “the family is the fundamental unit of society.” He spoke of “the centrality of the family” and promised that the UN “for its part will continue to draw attention to the family.” Yet he also said that “families take many various forms,” and that “traditional gender roles continue to evolve as more women work outside the home, and more men take on the responsibilities at home.”

Mr. Jacobson originally wrote this paper in 2004 when he was serving as Representative to the United Nations for Focus on the Family (U.S.A.), from 2001 to 2010.

135 Nations Support Pro-Family Resolution

During the special session, 14 ambassadors, officials or diplomats representing 135 nations, plus the HOLY SEE, made pro-family statements and expressed support for the Qatar pro-family resolution. QATAR (on behalf of the 132 developing nations that comprise the “G77”⁴) was the first nation to speak, followed by BENIN, BANGLADESH, BRUNEI DARUSSALAM (on behalf of the 10 ASEAN nations⁵), CHINA, GUATEMALA, INDONESIA, IRAN, THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA, MEXICO, SOUTH AFRICA, THE SUDAN, SYRIA, and the UNITED STATES.⁶ Below are excerpts from several statements.

QATAR: Qatar – on behalf of the G77, CHINA, AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS and the UNITED STATES and other co-sponsoring nations – introduced the pro-family resolution, *Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family* (A/59/L.29).

“The importance of the family issues, and the recognition of the fact that the role of the family in society is essential and vital, enjoys universal acceptance regardless of cultural, political and national backgrounds and interests. ...

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights put it succinctly: ‘The family is the fundamental natural group unit of society, and should be given the maximum protection of the society and the State.’ The General Assembly realized the family, as the basic unit of social life, is a major agent of sustainable development at all levels of society. ...

“Today we can see that the response of the international community [through the national, regional and international conferences on the family held this year] has been strong and will yield productive actions to protect and support the family. ...

“The Doha International Conference on the Family, on November 29 and 30, 2004 ... recognized and reaffirmed Article 16.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit ...”

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM / Association of South East Asia Nations (CAMBODIA, INDONESIA, LAO, MALAYSIA, MYANMAR, PHILIPPINES, SINGAPORE, THAILAND, VIETNAM): “The observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family is an opportunity to reaffirm commitments made by U.N. Member [Nations] to enhance their actions in incorporating effective family policies and programs into their national development strategies. ...

“One of the common features of the people in our region has always been the strong family bond that is part of our society, with families having important contributions to economic activities and social welfare. ...

“Last week, during the 10th ASEAN Summit in Laos, ASEAN leaders reaffirmed their commitment on enhancing effective family policies and programs into ... national development strategies. ...

“ASEAN is in the process of developing common approaches and sharing lessons learned in solving family and social problems, as well as documenting effective policies and best practice cases for strengthening support for family care provision, including public policy for strengthening traditional family values.”

CHINA: “The issue of the family is an old and complex one. It not only involves individual families, but also has a bearing on social cohesion and stability. ...

“First, governments must incorporate the family-perspective into social development policies and programs, and deploy all resources, including laws and regulations and appropriate

measures to foster a stable, harmonious and caring environment, and protect the interests of the family and its individual members. Importance must be given to the family as the basic cell of society, with a view to promoting an integrated, equitable and balanced development of the society.

“Second, the international community must take measures to increase global awareness of the importance of the family. While the specific issues related to the family may differ from country to country, the pursuit of happiness, stability and harmony is an aspiration and an inherent right shared by all families in the world. ...

“The Chinese nation takes pride in its long history and its many good traditions. Already in ancient times, Chinese sages advocated the philosophy of family harmony leading to good government, and in turn to universal peace. They argued for balance between state and family interests, reverence for the old and care for the young, and stressed family harmony and stability.

“Since the founding of New China, the government has sought to ensure family harmony and stability through legal protection, policy guidance and moral restraints. The saying, ‘Prosperity follows family harmony,’ has been a motto for every family in China seeking happiness. ...

“To mark the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, a World Summit on the Family, jointly sponsored by China’s National Population and Family Planning Committee and the World Family Organization, is being held today [December 6-9, 2004] in the city of Sanya in Hainan Province of China. The Summit is to comprehensively review and assess the progress made so far since the proclamation of the International Year of the Family [1994]”

GUATEMALA – *H.E. Ambassador Jorge Skinner-Klée*: “[The family] is the basic group unit of every society ... the family is the nucleus within which takes place the development of the human being, the owner of the future.

“[Guatemala is committed] to the family, as the natural and necessary instrument of bringing forth and nurturing human life. The Constitution of Guatemala renders mandatory the protection and promotion of the family”

INDONESIA: “(W)e recognize that the family is located at the very centre of human existence. Strong families contribute not only to the good order of society but they represent as well an untapped contributor to its economic and social development. ... (T)he family must therefore benefit from the widest possible protection and assistance to build its capacity for action.

“Without such support, family life will be at risk of deterioration and the result would most probably be various forms of deviance. In this regard the evidence is clear. Dysfunctional families put communities under stress and place great strain on the social infrastructure of nations. Indonesia believes that such a negative social situation is to be avoided at all costs. As a result, the national ideal is a well-integrated prosperous family. Towards that end, Indonesia has centralized the family in its policy-making process.

“[The family is] the fundamental unit of society consisting either of husband and wife, husband-wife and children, or mother and children, or even father and children”

“Together, the husband-and-wife team must create a happy, loving, nurturing home environment for their children to grow up in. Together, they must create the value system that will give their children strong religious and moral education and guide their actions in the wider

society. These values should inspire confidence and boldness but not create an orientation for domestic violence.”

MEXICO – *Sra. Ana Teresa Aranda, Director General, National System for the Integral Development of the Family*: “[Mexico’s] National Development Plan ... highlights the central role of the family in the government of President Fox

“All programs are being reviewed in order to guarantee their fulfillment of the purpose of supporting and strengthening those endeavors in which the family cannot be substituted

“In Mexico, 92.9 percent of households are constituted by families, and 89 percent of Mexicans consider the family as the most important thing in their lives. ...

“We are convinced, with the support that is given by the research, that the family is a valid and vital institution, that it is and will continue to be the fundamental institution of civilizations, the great producer of social capital and, therefore, the main strength of Mexico and the world.”

REPUBLIC OF KOREA (South Korea) – *Counsellor Mr. Seoung-hyun Moon* – “Ten years ago, the international community came together to underscore the importance of the family for social and human development, pledging their support for strengthening family policy and enhancing support to families. ... My government has implemented numerous measures to support family self-sufficiency and promote a caring environment within the family. ... (F)amily policy cannot be separated from other aspects of social policy ... an integrated family policy is needed.”

SOUTH AFRICA – *Minister Counsellor Mr. Xolisa Mabhongo*: “The family is recognized throughout humanity as an important and basic element of social existence. In South Africa, the family is regarded ... as a potent vehicle for the care, protection and development of its members. ... The disintegration of family life impacts negatively on the well-being of family members and leads to moral decay thus affecting the fiber of society. Furthermore ... South African families have been affected by ... colonization and urbanization.

“South Africa’s social welfare policy recognizes the need to preserve the family as a unit in which children are raised to be healthy

“South Africa is committed to strengthening and preserving families within communities for a better life for all, especially children.”

UNITED STATES – *Dr. Wade Horn, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*: “The U.S. Census Bureau defines a family as ‘two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption who reside in the same household.’ ...

“Throughout the ages, political philosophers, social historians, and civic and religious leaders have praised the family as the foundation of the social order, the bedrock of nations, and the bastion of civilization. Cicero ... spoke of the family as ‘the first society’ and ‘the seedbed of the state.’ ...

“The fact is that the family is a universal and irreplaceable community, rooted in human nature and the basis of all societies at all times. As the cradle of life and love for each new generation, the family is the primary source of personal identity, self-esteem, and support for children. It is also the first and foremost school of life, uniquely suited to teach children integrity, character, morals, responsibility, service and wisdom. ...

“These roles of transmitting culture and socializing children make the family indispensable to civil society, as families transform helpless, dependent babies into responsible,

independent adults. Thus, it is easy to understand why President George W. Bush has said ‘the character of a nation begins in the home.’ ...

“Given the importance of families to society, does the state have any role in supporting the family? We believe the answer is yes. ...

“To support families effectively, however, government must first recognize that families exist apart from the state. The U.S. Declaration of Independence stated that all human beings are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; in other words, rights that predate the state. The state must recognize and acknowledge these rights – and respect the family for what it is, as a matter of natural law. The state’s foremost obligation, therefore, is to respect, defend, and protect the family as an institution. As President Bush has said, government must ‘honor the family.’

“Given this understanding of the relationship between the state and the family, what, then, are the principles that guide family policy in America?

“First, we believe that government ought to create the conditions that allow strong and healthy families to thrive. ...

“Second, we believe that government should recognize the unique and irreplaceable contributions of mothers and fathers to the lives of their children. ...

“Third, we believe that public policy ought to strengthen healthy marriages and, where possible, the two-parent family. ...

“Fourth, we believe government policy should recognize that every child has dignity and worth, and as such ought to support all children and families. ...

“President Bush ... said:

‘My Administration is committed to strengthening the American family. Many one-parent families are also a source of comfort and reassurance, yet a family with a mom and dad who are committed to marriage and devote themselves to their children helps provide children a sound foundation for success.’”

HOLY SEE – *S.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore*: “[T]he family [is] a basic unit of society by its very nature ... The family, a lasting and stable union between a man and a woman, seems to be the most natural and suitable way to ensure procreation and therefore the continuation of generations because economic growth requires a minimum of demographic growth, which comes through reproduction so that the population can be sustained. But above and beyond this demographic dimension, we also have to take into consideration that the base of this society and world is the family, where an individual begins to acquire certain character traits, knowledge and certain attitudes that will enable people to become creative builders of society. Indeed, it is not just a matter of bringing children into the world, but to rear them properly. ... As the first place where human capital is molded, the family is crucial to development. ...

“The family is too neglected today. There cannot be any action taken for families, and to benefit families, without a true political will to promote a model of families. In particular, the expression of ‘a core unit of society’ refers to a very specific concept of social order based on the existence of stable communities of people

“In response to economic and social challenges of our time ... the need to promote the family as a preventive policy [must be recognized]. This does not mean reinventing anything. ...

“Family policy ... makes sustainable economic development possible. Its goal is not to eliminate the family.

“Family policy must be holistic. It must have objectives to promote a model without punishing people for wanting to have children.”

Netherlands Delivers Anti-Family Speech for 36 European Nations

THE NETHERLANDS spoke on behalf of the entire EUROPEAN UNION (25 nations), plus BULGARIA, CROATIA, ROMANIA and TURKEY (EU candidate countries); ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO (potential EU countries); and ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY. Europe declared that “the concept and composition” of the family “has changed,” and went on to say that the institutions of “marriage” and “family” should not be limited based on “sexual orientation.”⁷

Pro-Family Resolutions Passes by Consensus of Overwhelming Majority

QATAR formally introduced the resolution – which welcomed the Doha International Conference on the Family (November 29-30, 2004), and the regional, African conference on the family held in BENIN (July 27-28, 2004), and “took note of their outcome” documents [i.e., the Doha Declaration] – and said, “We would ask all members to please support the family by supporting the resolution.”

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, ARMENIA and KAZAKHSTAN added their names as co-sponsors to the pro-family resolution.

No country called for a vote, so the Vice President of the General Assembly said, “May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/59/L.29 as orally revised? It is so decided!” Thus the pro-family resolution passed by consensus.

25 European Nations, 3 Others, Disassociate From Pro-Family Resolution

Just before or after the resolution passed, eight ambassadors or country representatives, representing 28 of the 191 Member Nations of the United Nations, delivered an “explanation of vote” (EOV) or “explanation of position” (EOP), disassociating their nations from the pro-family resolution. THE NETHERLANDS spoke on behalf of the 25 EUROPEAN UNION countries,⁸ followed by AUSTRALIA, CANADA, ICELAND, LICHTENSTEIN, NEW ZEALAND, NORWAY and SWITZERLAND. Why? Because the resolution did not contain the phrase “various forms of the family” (code words to advance a same-sex union agenda).

EUROPEAN UNION – H.E. Ambassador Mr. Dirk Jan van den Berg of THE NETHERLANDS: “The concept and composition of families has changed in the course of time, illustrating the fact that the family is a living, dynamic entity. ...

“[T]he European Union ... embraces social inclusion as a means to eradicate ... discrimination. ...

“The European Union therefore regrets that a co-sponsor of the resolution (L.29) ... has not been willing to address the concerns of the European Union and other delegations. The European Union supports resolution A/C.3/59/L.2 ... that has been adopted by the Third Committee [in early 2004, and did not contain the term “husband and wife,” but did contain the inclusive phrase, “various forms of the family”] ... (and) believes that this text reflects the international consensus

“Unfortunately, the co-sponsors have brought non-consensual elements to the resolution, A/59/L.29. We regret that we are therefore unable to support this resolution, and the European Union will therefore disassociate itself from the text of this resolution.”

NORWAY: “Norway puts great emphasis on questions relating to and the role of families in society. We regard the outcomes documents of the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development and the 24th Special Session of the GA, Beijing and Beijing+5 ... and of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo ... as key consensus documents for policies and action related to the family in all its various forms. Moreover, we continue to stand firmly committed to ... the CEDAW Convention [Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Women] and the Convention on the Rights of the Child as fundamental parts of the framework for policies and actions related to families.⁹ ...

“With these sets of basic international, political and legal commitments in mind, it is Norway’s view that we today first and foremost should focus on entering an era of implementing commitments previously made. The development of new declarations and outcome documents in a non-UN context,¹⁰ and with a selective focus on some of the various forms¹¹ of the family that exist, could, in our view, prove counterproductive

“It is with this in mind that we today feel compelled to disassociate ourselves from consensus on the resolution before us.”

SWITZERLAND: “My delegation would like to disassociate itself from the consensus. ... The family can come in various forms.”

CANADA: “Canada joins other delegations in disassociating itself from consensus on this text. ... Although we support the aim of this text, we are concerned about what is *not in* the text. In particular, we believe that it is important to recognize that in different cultural, political and social systems various forms of the family exist. This reality has been recognized on numerous occasions in the past, including Beijing”

AUSTRALIA: “Australia fully supports the comments made by the delegations of Norway, Switzerland and Canada, and wishes to disassociate ourselves from consensus on this resolution.”

ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN agreed with the previous speakers, and disassociated themselves from consensus on the resolution.

NEW ZEALAND: “We believe that families are the fundamental building blocks of our communities, our societies and our nations. We must support them. And we must commit ourselves to recognizing the family as a source of strength, belonging and cohesion. ... In the course of the last year, New Zealand has announced two major initiatives to support the family. ... Firstly, New Zealand has established a Commission for the Family to advocate for the family within government and in the community. Secondly, New Zealand has announced governmental financial assistance for families, entitled the Working for Families package. ...

“New Zealand’s commitment to the family is indisputable. We are therefore disappointed that our views during the negotiations of this resolution ... and the efforts of other countries that have voiced similar concerns to ours, have been represented as anti-family.

“Let me, therefore, take the time to be clear about the difficulties we have with elements of this resolution. New Zealand is increasingly concerned that the debate on the family is becoming a vehicle for attacking long-standing consensus agreements on tolerance of family diversity and the rights of women and children.

“We are concerned, for example, that the Doha Declaration omits a long-standing agreed reference to the fact that many forms of the family exist, and that it contains no reference to the rights of women and children. The Declaration should have acknowledged that the rights of individuals within families should also be protected

“Given that the Doha Declaration is inconsistent with the United Nations agreements reached at Cairo, Beijing and Copenhagen, we are concerned that it [the Doha Declaration] is being noted in this resolution. It is particularly unusual for this assembly to note documents that were produced by conferences to which not all governments were invited.

“Many forms of the family do exist. That is the reality. And we cannot ignore it. ... We therefore regret that this text and the Doha Declaration together promote only one model of the family at the expense of others New Zealand is therefore ... compelled to disassociate itself from the consensus on this particular resolution.”

The final speakers, all supporting the resolution in contrast to those above, were BENIN – which asked for support for African nations; CUBA – which made an unclear statement, but expressed support for Qatar’s G77 statement; and QATAR – which thanked the nations for their support for the resolution.

Endnotes

¹ For the text of the pro-family resolution, see, *Historic Pro-Family Resolution Passed by UN General Assembly*, Focus UN brief 2004-18.

² See *Mexico City Declaration & Doha Declar. Chart Course for Restoring Respect for the Family*, Focus brief 2004-20.

³ Earlier in the year, the Secretary General issued a report, “Preparations for and observations of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family” [UN document A/59/176], 23 July 2004, which is available on the UN Official Documents System web site: documents.un.org.

⁴ G77 web site is: www.g77.org. To access the list of 132 Member Nations, select “General Information,” and then select “Member States.”

⁵ All the ASEAN nations – the Association of South East Asia Nations – are also part of the G77.

⁶ Of this group of speakers, only Mexico, Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the United States are *not* part of the G77.

⁷ For further elaboration, see *European Union Uses International Year of the Family Celebration to Attempt to Change Concept of “Family”*, Focus UN brief 2004-19.

⁸ The 25 Member Nations of the European Union, including the additional 10 added in 2004, are: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and United Kingdom.

⁹ None of these conferences, outcome documents conventions can honestly be claimed to be pro-family. Rather, each of these conferences and conventions, during the 1979-2000 period, were used to attempt to create numerous “rights” – sexual, social, women’s, children’s – which reject the sanctity of sexuality within the covenant of marriage; disregard personal responsibility; or pit wives against husbands and children against parents. The negative impact upon individuals, families and nations of creating such “rights” by fiat was either ignored or not understood. NOTE: The European Union and other dissenting nations focused on these same conferences as the foundation for family policy, ignoring the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other pro-family UN documents.

¹⁰ This is a subtle way of discrediting the numerous pro-family conferences (that were not-UN funded or hosted) held all over the world this year, over which the UN and European Union nations had no control, and rejecting the pro-family Mexico City Declaration, Doha Declaration and other outcomes.

¹¹ Norway is here saying that since the non-UN conferences did to affirm or promote same-sex unions as a legitimate “various form of the family,” it rejects those conferences and their outcomes.