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***Interagency Statement on the  
International Year of the Family, 1994***

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family, with the aim of creating among Governments, policy-makers and the public a greater awareness of the family as the fundamental unit of society and of promoting activities in support of families. The Assembly called on all concerned organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system to exert every effort in the preparations for the Year, in its observance and in the achievement of its objectives.

This joint statement, issued by the heads of concerned organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, is an expression of intent about our respective organizations' commitment to the objectives of the Year.

As basic units of society, families and their well-being are germane to all our organizations. Our programmes affect them, in one way or another, even if this is not always, or immediately, apparent.

Families are entitled to protection by society and State in order to be able to fully assume their responsibilities as fundamental group units of society. The need for such protection has been recognized in relevant international instruments which make it a duty for States parties to adopt legislative, administrative and other measures to ensure adequate protection to the family and its unity, either directly or through support to the activities of the relevant social institutions.

In spite of the many changes in society that have altered their forms and functions, families can provide a vital nurturing framework for the emotional and material support essential to the growth and well-being of their members. Families play an important role in formal and informal education and are active agents for transmitting human values and cultural identity as well as preserving inter-generational

links. In this, families are vital to sustainable development. The process of development, however, tends to change the nature of the family. While many of these changes are generally accepted as positive, these and other changes have often constrained the ability of many families to meet their basic human rights and needs. These constraints have increased in many countries, as programmes of retrenchment, adjustment and economic transition take place.

The pace and prevalence of change have also differed in different countries, just as families differ in their types, strengths and weaknesses. There is, therefore, no simple view and no easy definition of the family or of family policy. Yet, despite the major changes most societies have undergone in recent decades, policies and programmes still tend to be based on concepts and family models that may no longer reflect reality, notably with respect to gender equality as well as the rights of most of their vulnerable members, especially children.

In the positive sense, families are primary agents of socialization and are capable of enabling constructive change and development. They can constitute an essential mechanism for promoting respect for human rights of all individuals. But negative aspects, including social problems, exploitation and abuse, are also often evident within family relationships, hindering individual initiative and personal development. There is a constant need, therefore, to foster the development of perceptions and perspectives regarding families and intra-familial relationships that are consistent with basic human rights, fundamental freedoms and internationally accepted social policy standards and principles. The traditional gender-based division of productive and reproductive functions in the family does not reflect current realities. More and more women in all parts of the world take up productive employment outside the home. Yet they continue to have the major responsibility for reproductive, caring and household functions. A partnership between men and women on the basis of equal rights and responsibilities is the challenge for the modern family. Basic to this challenge is ~~family~~<sup>gender</sup> equality in the household, equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women as well as participation of women in employment.

We welcome the opportunity offered by the International Year of the Family to focus attention on the numerous family issues and, in particular, on vulnerable families. Single parent families, especially the growing number of households headed by females are among the poorest families. The poverty level of families with disabled members

members. Refugee and internationally displaced families, both political and environmental, call for particular attention. The plight of people forced to flee for fear of their lives and liberty or because of the destruction of their livelihood as a result of environmental degradation is one of the greatest tragedies of our times, which disrupts the unity and role of the family. Families affected by HIV/AIDS virus are another group requiring attention. Family breakdown is reflected in increasing domestic violence, drug addiction, sexual abuse, child abuse and neglect. There is much to be done to raise awareness of these problems and their effects. Similarly, access to family planning information and quality services, long recognized as a basic right for all individuals, needs to be improved. The role of the family in achieving "health for all by the year 2000" and "education for all" should be further reinforced.

In seeking to achieve the objectives the General Assembly has set for the Year, the first goal should be to recognize the participation of families in the achievement of fundamental human development aims, such as poverty alleviation, health, nutrition, education, shelter and employment. A second goal might then be to formulate "family-sensitive" policies and help to improve national capacities to monitor their implementation. A third goal should be to encourage organizations and agencies, whether governmental or non-governmental, national or international, to assess how their decisions and action will affect families. Without the full involvement of families and community organizations, there can be no sustained improvement of people's living conditions and quality of life. While families are targets of social welfare policies, they also contribute to the stability of rural and urban communities and, as such, should be seen as chosen partners of participatory development initiatives, including those aimed at improving the local environment. The Year offers an opportunity to link family well-being to the goals of sustainable development.

Pursuant to General Assembly's request, and within the parameters of the mandates of our organizations and agencies, we have been extending our support and cooperation for the preparation of the Year. In order to better coordinate activities and develop a system-wide approach, ad hoc interagency meetings have been instituted, and various kinds of multilateral activities are growing.

These efforts will be strengthened, as far as programmatic considerations permit,

incorporate IYF elements into existing programmes. This could include introducing the concept of "family impact" in programme planning and evaluation. Existing channels of information dissemination will be used to promote the objectives of the Year. The field/country office networks will be encouraged to support national and local IYF efforts, in order to strengthen the national and local level focus of the Year.

The subject of the family provides a unique convergence of numerous issues of social policy, human rights and development. The International Year of the Family can contribute significantly to the consolidation of achievements in the numerous areas of direct concern to our respective programmes. It is an occasion to promote the concept of the family as the smallest democracy at the heart of society. We solicit the active participation and support of all our partners and collaborators in its observance.

**Heads of concerned organizations and specialized agencies of the UN system  
(Names of organizations)**