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The Family



Number 3/1993

Bulletin on the International Year of the Family, 1994

Children: a basic focus in IYF

It is generally accepted that the future of the world rests upon today's children. The family has the primary responsibility for nurturing and protecting children throughout their teenage years. The family should provide a loving, healthy and protective environment, allowing children to play, learn and grow in peace as they mature into adulthood, leaving them with a sense of cultural identity and moral values so that they contribute to the greater good of society.

But for many of the world's children, the reality of their daily lives presents a starkly different picture, as is illustrated by the following facts:

- Each day, 40,000 children die from malnutrition and disease, including the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), inadequate sanitation and the lack of clean water, and the effects of drug abuse;
- Over 100 million children are without basic schooling, and two thirds of them are girls;
- Millions of children suffer daily from the ravages of poverty and the economic crisis, hunger, homelessness, epidemics, illiteracy and environmental abuses.

The challenge illustrated by such statistics was taken up by the World Summit for Children, held on 30 September 1990 in New York. Participants identified practical steps that countries were recommended to take by the year 2000 to nurture and support the world's children and adopted the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for Implementing the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s (General Assembly document A/45/625, annex). At the World Summit, the assembled world leaders affirmed their commitment to work for the role of the family in providing for children.

Defining the role of the family the key to securing the rights of



The Secretary-General of the United Nations accepts a commemorative plaque from the Coordinator for IYF.

Photo: H. Pfeifer

Inter-agency statement on IYF

Issued jointly by organizations and specialized agencies of the UN system

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family (IYF), 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 invited all organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system concerned to exert all possible efforts in the preparation for and observance of the Year, and to cooperate with the Secretary-General in the achievement of its objectives.

This joint statement, issued by the organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system concerned, 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.

Note: This statement was approved by the Organizational Committee of the Administrative Committee on Coordination in 1993.

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Children

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children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 44/25, specifies in its preamble that "the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community".

One goal of IYF is to promote the implementation of the World Declaration and the Convention. That goal has been pursued at the regional preparatory meetings for IYF (see *The Family*, No. 2, 1993), each of which adopted recommendations calling for measures to safeguard the protection available to children in families.

Children's issues receive a high priority in national programmes in preparation for and observance of IYF. They have also been a major topic of attention in the activities of the United Nations system for IYF. In a recent discussion paper prepared by the United Nations Children's Fund, it was suggested that IYF could raise awareness about the role of the family as the first line of defence for the child and a major factor in the survival, health, education, social development and protection of children, thereby making the stability of the family a topic of concern for everyone and an investment for future generations.

As is stated in the World Declaration: "We do this not only for the present generation, but for all generations to come. There can be no task nobler than giving every child a better future". ■

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 is also high. Labour migration to secure a livelihood is frequently a source of family tension and disintegration, also leading to intensified responsibilities for female 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 livelihoods 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 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 actions 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

Inter-agency statement on IYF

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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 gender equality in the household, equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women as well 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 inter-agency meetings have been instituted, and various kinds of multilateral activities are growing.

These efforts will be strengthened, as far as programmatic considerations permit, so that the objectives of the Year can be achieved. Where it is not possible to develop and implement new programmes in the context of the Year, efforts will be made to 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 the observance of the International Year of the Family. ■

National action

Brunei Darussalam

The national action plan for IYF includes the Happy Family Campaign, launched by Her Majesty the Raja Isteri. During the Campaign, symposiums are being held on topics such as the care of children, the family in Islam, legal aspects of the family and child abuse and domestic violence. Awareness-raising activities include Campaign songs, a commemorative stamp and a nation-wide poster competition.

Chile

The National Coordinating Committee has identified activities to be the basis of specific projects that will include efforts to promote knowledge and studies on the expectations, problems and resources of the Chilean family and the effects on families of migration to towns. The aims of the projects include supporting family-assistance strategies and strengthening the existing network of information exchange and collaboration between non-governmental organizations and the Government.

Jordan

As part of the observance of IYF, health and nutrition programmes are being developed, with special attention being given to rural and nomadic areas. Existing legislation is being reviewed and studies are being undertaken on the causes of school leaving at the elementary level as well as on the growing phenomenon of homelessness.

Ukraine

The Academy of Sciences of Ukraine has set up a scientific council to examine problems of the family and women at work. A department has also been created to deal with marriage, the family and the social status of women. Attention will be given to the expansion of family-related services as well as to the situation of orphaned children living in family settings. Promotional television and radio programmes are to be broadcast nationally and regionally.

Publications

Publications related to family issues are listed below. Requests for copies should be addressed directly to the publishers. Future publications may be brought to the attention of the IYF secretariat for inclusion in this column in subsequent issues of *The Family*.

"Family development", *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, special issue, vol. LIV, No. 1 (January 1993).

This special issue contains articles on a range of subjects related to curriculum planning for family-centred social work. It also contains the bibliography of an Indian course on family dynamics and development programmes. For more information, contact: *The Indian Journal of Social*

Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, P.O. Box 8313, Bombay 400 088, India.

Claire Auzias, *Les familles de l'est en transition* (Paris, Institut de l'enfance et de la famille, 1993).

This publication provides a novel, cross-disciplinary description of the situation of families in eastern Europe and is part of the broad research programme of the Institut de l'enfance et de la famille. For more information, contact: Institut de l'enfance et de la famille, 3, rue Coq Héron, 75001 Paris, France. ■

National coordinating committees

The Family continues to report on countries that have formally established national coordinating committees for IYF. Since the last issue was published, the IYF secretariat has been advised of the establishment of such committees in China, El Salvador, Honduras and Romania.

UN Interregional Meeting adopts recommendations

The United Nations Interregional Meeting on the Role of the Family in the Socialization of Youth, held at Beijing from 31 May to 4 June 1993, adopted by consensus a comprehensive set of recommendations and guidelines on the interactive roles of youth and the family in society. Participants came from Bangladesh, China, Egypt, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Russian Federation. Representatives of seven organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system also participated in the Meeting. Observers for the Asian Youth Council, International Association of Juvenile and Family Court Magistrates, International Catholic Child Bureau, International Planned Parenthood Federation, International Union of Family Organisations and the Organization of African Unity also attended.

The Meeting, in its treatment of youth and family issues, discussed working papers prepared by 10 participants on the role of the family in the socialization of youth as well as preparations for and the observance of both IYF and the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year in 1995.

The Meeting had been convened by the Youth Policies and Programmes Unit and the IYF secretariat of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development

of the United Nations Secretariat in close cooperation with the All-China Youth Federation. One major output of the Meeting will be a publication based on its proceedings including recommendations and guidelines to be disseminated widely in 1993 to national focal points on youth and family-related organizations.

The recommendations included intersectoral proposals on national youth policies programmes and legislation, as well as on national family policies, programmes and legislation. The recommendations called for, *inter alia*, better coordination of family and youth issues by Governments and non-governmental organizations; comprehensive data collection and interdisciplinary research on the interactive roles, problems and concerns of youth and the family in the 1990s and beyond; and the strengthening of non-governmental youth organizations at all levels to enhance their roles in the socialization of youth, both in and out of school.

The guidelines were adopted following an examination of numerous sectoral issues, including education, health, employment, juvenile delinquency, mass media, migrants and refugees, families at risk, social welfare services and culture and recreation. The aim of the guidelines is to help policy makers on youth issues set priorities in the various sectors of concern to the family and youth, and to provide services geared to the situations of particular target categories of the population. Those target categories include the educated and the illiterate, families living in rural and urban areas and families at risk. Guidelines were also adopted on the preparations for and observance of IYF and the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year.

(Copies of the report of the Meeting may be obtained from either the IYF secretariat, United Nations Office at Vienna or the Youth Policies and Programmes Unit, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, United Nations Headquarters, New York.) ■

Meeting of family associations adopts declaration

As a preparatory measure for IYF, the International Meeting of Family Associations was held at Sevilla, Spain, on 11 June 1993. Organized by Acción Familiar, a national family organization, the Meeting was attended by representatives of family associations from around the world, especially from Spanish-speaking countries. After presentations on various perspectives on the family and family issues had been heard, a declaration on the rights and responsibilities of families was adopted. ■

Regional NGOs adopt declaration on IYF

A number of Latin American and Caribbean non-governmental organizations working in the area of the family recently adopted a declaration on the International Year of the Family. In the declaration, they reaffirmed the importance of the topic of the family and pledged to participate actively in the process of policy formulation regarding families, to better coordinate the work of non-governmental organizations on behalf of families and to develop strategies for reviving the values and principles that consider the family as the basic unit of society. ■

Editor's note

The IYF secretariat welcomes contributions for inclusion in *The Family*, which is published every three months in English, French and Spanish.

Material in *The Family* may be freely quoted or reprinted if acknowledgement is provided. It is requested that a copy of the publication containing the quotation or reprint be forwarded to the IYF secretariat.

Request for copies of *The Family* and further information on the International Year of the Family should be directed to:

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