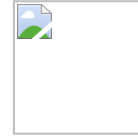




Family Matters



Circular No. 18

Follow-up to the International Year of the Family - February 1999

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The Family Unit

The Follow up to the International Year of the Family is the responsibility of the Division for Social Policy and Development within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The follow-up activities to the International Year of the Family are in accordance with intergovernmental mandates e.g. General Assembly resolutions 50/142 of 21 December 1995 and 52/81 of 12 December 1997 respectively. The Family Unit welcomes ongoing information and data on family-related policies and programmes from concerned actors and focal points.

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Commission for Social Development held its Thirty-Seventh Session at Headquarters, 9-19 February 1999

The Commission reviewed a preliminary assessment of achievement and constraints on the implementation of the commitments made at the Social Summit, and began the process of identifying further initiatives for consideration by the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives. Moreover, the Commission considered issues pertaining to ageing, in particular, the International Year of Older Persons (1999), and had reviewed the outcome of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held in Lisbon last year.

The Commission conducted its work through discussions, dialogue-format sessions and panel discussions. Several parallel events were scheduled, including a two-day conference on ACaring Communities for the 21st Century@, in celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, and an international video-conference on ageing.

The Commission also heard from Mr. Federico Mayor, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and Ms. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children=s Fund (UNICEF).

A report of the Secretary-General on social services for all set out suggestions to assist the Commission in formulating its recommendations to advance the implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action as it relates to basic social services. A note by the Secretary-General transmitted the report of the expert workshop on innovations in the deliver and financing of social services, held at United Nations Headquarters from 14 to 16 October 1998. Another note by the Secretary-General transmitted the report of the workshop on ensuring access to social services of under-served populations, held at Bangkok from 2 to 6 November 1998.

A report of the Secretary-General on further initiatives for the implementation of the outcome of the Social Summit stated that the Commission would consider two priority themes in 1999: social services for all; and initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit.

A report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends was also reviewed. A note by the Secretary-General on the International Year of Older Persons and follow-up arrangements included suggestions for the development of a long-term perspective strategy on ageing into the twenty-first century. The interim report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond reviewed its implementation.

The priority themes of the Commission=s session focus on a review of efforts to reach the goal of access by all to basic social services and a review of progress made in the implementation of the outcome of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development.

The Commission had before it two draft resolutions. The first entitled International Year of Older Persons, 1999: Towards a society for all ages@ was sponsored by Croatia and the Dominican Republic. Jamaica and Pakistan joined as co-sponsors to the draft. The draft resolution on policies and programmes involving youth was sponsored by Portugal. The Dominican Republic, Swaziland and Uganda joined as co-sponsors.

Concluding its thirty-seventh session, the Commission for Social Development adopted, without a vote, a set of agreed conclusions on social services for all.

That text will be transmitted to the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives and to the Economic and Social Council.

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Some Highlights on Family Issues During the Commission

The Minister for Social Protection of Belarus stated that one of the most important indicators of the health of a society was the well-being of families. In Belarus, family violence had increased, hindering children=s development and negatively impacting the moral health of the population. Attention to people, especially those in difficult situations, was not a secondary addendum to reforms, but the main condition for progressive change.

The Minister said that her country=s experience in social transformation, in the context of political transition, could be of interest to other countries. One of the most important indicators of the health of a society was the well-being of families. In Belarus, one out of every two families breaks up, and there had been 8,000 children born out of wedlock in one year. Family violence had increased, hindering children=s development and negatively impacting the moral health of the population. Attention to people, especially to those in difficult situations was not a secondary addendum to reforms, but the main condition for progressive change. It was why a system of social services for the population was an objective necessity.

While noting the positive developments in the country, she emphasized that the present potential did not satisfy the existing needs for social services for families and children. The Government had developed a draft law on social services to determine strategies for carrying them out.

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The Minister of Social Affairs of Cameroon said that today in the Cameroon, people over the age of 65 represented 3 per cent of the population of 15 million. The increase in the number of elderly people was accompanied by the fall in family income and the persistent financial crisis. There was therefore a need to rapidly put in place a programme to care for the third age.

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The Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of Croatia said that many of her country=s elderly, were exposed to war stress. With their systems of social support from other family members weakened, the result was an increased dependence upon organized assistance and care from other persons.

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Speaking on behalf of the European Union and the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Associated country Cyprus, the representative stated that the EU=s point of view, other important issues for discussions are post-conflict reconstruction, the significance of violence and crime in societies, violence against women and children, HIV/AIDS, the role of families and the situation of children. The prepcom in May could examine the use of communication and other technologies as a means of helping groups with special needs but also as an emergency device in case of disasters. The social costs of global crime and their consequences for poverty eradication efforts should also be an aspect.

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The representative of Finland said that, while there were differences between countries, there were a number of choices to be made by all. Among the questions to be addressed were: Would basic social services be provided to all or only to the few? How best could society be involved in such efforts? How could a sustainable funding mix between families, the public sector and market-based institutions be designed to provide basic social services and protection to all in an equitable manner?

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The representative of Korea said that programmes should be developed to strengthen capacity-building for the elderly. Efforts were needed to create a social environment to care for the elderly, which could be fostered through enhanced understanding within and cooperation between families, neighbourhoods and communities.

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The representative from the Philippines said that in her country, the Minimum Basic Needs Approach served as the central strategy for prioritizing the primary requirements of different types of needs of the family and the community. It was a focused, sustained, participatory and integrated implementation of government

poverty-alleviation efforts. For the past four years, major programme intervention were focused on the identification of beneficiaries and the integration and delivery of social services through the Minimum Basic Needs Community Based Information System and the Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services Project. As a result, the overall unmet needs of families in 1,154 villages, such as potable water, sanitation, day-care or pre-school and durable housing, were reduced by an average of 52 per cent in 1997.

The representative of the Philippines said that her country had drawn up a six-year Plan of Action for Older Persons covering the period from 1999 to 2004. It was also focusing on two emerging issues: the provision of services to older persons in need and the mobilization of older persons as a resource for other sectors of society. Philippine society placed great reliance on the traditional family as the primary support system for the elderly. That duty, deeply rooted in Asian values, was constitutionally mandated in her country and was translated into programmes that provided incentives to families who supported their elderly in order to ease the Government's resource burden.

She said that older persons could be a valuable addition to the workforce, especially in the light of the growing trend of relatively fewer young people entering the labour market. Unfortunately, those traditional roles of the elderly and the family were gradually being eroded because of migration, urbanization and poverty.

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The Secretary of State for Family Affairs of Poland said that the highly developed countries had experienced the decline of multi-generational families. The Polish tradition and culture had manifested strong inter-generational links and conviction of the necessity of promoting multi-generational families and consolidation of their participation in providing care for older people. The family in Poland constituted the basic, natural and universal social group with a place for everyone B parents, children, grandparents and other relatives. Its role was not limited to mutual assistance. The family community was the source of emotional security. It dealt particularly with the family sense of acceptance, recognition, usefulness and security, which were much needed, especially after retirement from active professional life, which considerably intensified the sense of isolation and loneliness.

He also said that the scarcity of apartments for multi-generational families constituted a considerable barrier in meeting the need of living together. That was why there was an urgent demand for removing the existing barriers in that regard everywhere where the multi-generational family was recognized and socially needed. That need should be the subject of legal regulations at the regional, national and international levels.

The representative from Poland said that her country was expanding the scope for social services provided. Poland was trying to provide access to high quality education. Vocational camps were organized and financed for children of poor families and disabled children. From 1990-1997, the number of family diagnostic and consultation centres had increased by about 20 per cent.

The Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Social Policy of Poland said that today, many of the provisions for the family were almost obsolete. The progress in medical science, biochemistry and genetics imposed new requirements. In addition, the concept of family was changing and must be evaluated. There was need for, at the very least, a partial response to those modern issues. The concept of family was evolving, as were ideas about its functions, and views on the issue were diverse.

Current reports on the rights of the family demonstrated that international legal protections, as they now stood, were not enough, she added. Strengthening those rights through the development of relevant international laws was a difficult task. The effects of various instruments should be evaluated using formal criteria, such as ratification. In addition, elaborating a new provision that would strengthen the rights of the family was necessary.

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The representative from Spain said that his country was working on plans for supporting families with dependent older persons and how to deal with gerontology at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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The representative from United States of America stated that a major actor and key constituency in the area of social development is the family. If we are to achieve social integration, we must first pay attention to families, for they play a critical role in socializing our children and building our future societies. Today, in every corner of the world families are under stress B stress created by the demands of the international economy, and by the unavailability of health care, day care, education, food and other necessities. Governments must join with international and private organizations to address these needs and to strengthen and empower families.

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Statements were made by the Chairman of the Foundation for the Rights of the Family. He said that the principles contained in the document entitled Basic principles of the family@ referred not only to each family member, but also to the collective entity of the family unit and its procreative, educational and socializing functions and responsibilities. The basic principles enunciated the free and full consent of partners to enter a union as a basis for a family, the respect for the dignity of the family, the freedom of family members to manifest B as a family or a community B their culture and religion, family autonomy and the right to freely organize internal functioning, including gender equality.

He further said that the document made special references to those with problems such as disabled families and dependent ageing mothers, unemployment, large and single parent families. Those guiding principles, presented to all interested non-governmental organizations, governments and United Nations bodies as a working instrument, should precipitate the study of a possible declaration, of universal

projection, on the functions, responsibilities and rights of the family.

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The representative of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres said that the various United Nations definitions of social services were too limited. A comprehensive definition should include not only health and education, but the strengthening of community organization; provision of services especially designed for vulnerable populations - such as battered women=s shelters; programmes for people living with HIV/AIDS; day care for single-parent families; mental health treatment; services for the elderly; provision of activities for all age groups; and specialized services for immigrants and refugees.

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The representative of the International Federation for Home Economics said that to implement a sound social plan, it was necessary to establish basic services for the entire family. Those issues included income security, health, shelter, education and psychological multi-generational challenges. It was crucial that the planning of those services, whether under governmental or voluntary civic auspices, included the families and local communities. Also, social services should be readily available in an accessible location, in familiar social institutions such as schools, community centres and places of worship. As governments and NGOs prepared for the review process of the Copenhagen Summit, it was crucial that the issues and concerns of the family, the basic unit of society, be addressed, she continued. Family issues had to be mainstreamed in all discussions for social development.

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The representative of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family said that organization was a platform of some 60 international non-governmental organizations concerned with families and promoting the family in the field of social development. The Committee played a key role before and during the International Year of the Family in 1994 and collaborated very closely with the United Nations on that commemoration. Of high priority was the Committee=s long-standing contacts with Central and Eastern European countries, where family related organizations felt a strong need to cooperate, exchange views and experiences and to learn about the various ways to approach problems.

She said that the role of the family was crucial for providing such services as nurturing, health care, clothing, housing and care of the elderly and disabled. The Committee suggested that, in the follow-up to the Copenhagen Summit, due consideration should be given to the impact of developmental strategies and policies on the family and vice versa.

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The representative of Real Women of Canada, said that the special session of the

Assembly should consider the issue of *Mainstreaming the family*. Mainstreaming, in that context, meant that the promises made at Copenhagen to strengthen and support the family be always kept at the forefront, and that each initiative for social development be examined to determine its impact on the family. Firstly, it should be determined whether the initiatives supported, not supplanted, the family in its central role as nurturer, educator, transmitter of culture and agent of healthy development. Secondly, whether they led to greater family cohesion and stability, rather than possibly adding to the stresses that were tearing families apart. Thirdly, whether they led to greater family self-sufficiency, rather than dependence. Mainstreaming the family was an urgent issue because modernization was placing stress on families everywhere, and disintegration of the family exacerbated most of the problems addressed by the Commission. Moreover, it met all of the stated criteria for inclusion in the special session.

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The representative of both the World Movement of Mothers and Family Voice of Brigham Young University, said that because family stability and parental influences played a central role in the development and well-being of youth, social development activities had to recognize and foster healthy family linkages. Programmes that overemphasize individualism or the achievement of rights for youth and children had to be careful to balance those objectives with a respect for parental responsibilities and familial ties. Otherwise, such programmes ran the risk of undermining social development of youth rather than enhancing it. Social development programs should avoid undermining the ties between parents and youth that research showed assisted in healthy development.

It must also be recognized that governmental or social policies and programmes could not replace the functions of the family in promoting positive social development in children and youth, he continued. There were limits to what governmental or social programmes could and should do in attempting to impact family life, and care should be taken to preserve the capacity of families to develop an atmosphere of healthy and positive development for children and youth.

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The representative of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Social Development Division said that the rapid ageing of the population had particular implications for the socio-economic development of the countries in the region, including diminishing participants in the labour force, increasing economic dependency and rising incidence of caregiving to older persons by members of the family.

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The assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau of Development Policy, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), expressed concern that the 1990s would become a *lost decade* for a several hundred million people. Not only was the spreading financial crisis eroding the asset base of poor households, undermining the security of livelihoods and mortgaging futures as income earners lost their jobs, but families were also cutting down on meals and basic consumption, while children were being forced to drop out of school.

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