

Statement to the 42nd Session of the Commission for Social Development, (4-13 Feb. 2004)
by Peter Crowley
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Mr Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the floor to speak on behalf of the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions (ICAA) and other members of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family - of which I am Chairperson. ICAA is one of the 67 member organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, which was founded in 1985 and serves a world-wide network of family-oriented organisations, who come from civil society, research and university institutions.

May I respectfully draw your attention to the joint INGO Statement, Conference document E/CN.5/2004/NGO prepared by The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family and signed by INGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC.

As the United Nations Secretary-General stated in his message on the launch of the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family on December 4th 2003 “families have always been the essential social unit in all societies.” This reiterates the Twenty-fourth Special Session of the General Assembly, (“Further initiatives for social development”, para. 56, Geneva 26 June-1 July 2000)” “that the family is the basic unit of society and that it plays a key role in social development and is a strong force of social cohesion and integration.” It would hence seem appropriate to take a family-focused approach to national and international co-operation for social development thus benefiting from partners directly involved in the intricate day-to-day challenges confronting society.

Mr Chairman, issues such as:

1. The paradigmatic changes in demographic development, also in developing countries is having long term consequences for society. In the 1960s the Total Fertility Rate in Less Developed Countries was 6.0 and today it is under 3.0 children per woman. The United Nations projects that before 2050, 80% of the world population will have below-replacement levels. The concern is not the drop in fertility rates, as such, especially as many of those children would be born into poverty. Of concern is the grade and speed of this development and the capacity of society to deal with its consequences. This fact in synergy with an ageing society leads to,
2. the breakdown in the intergenerational contract, where one generation guaranteed the economic survival in old age of the other.
3. The HIV/Aids pandemic, partly wipes out in many countries and regions, the parent or “carer generation”, leaving grandparents to look after their grandchildren, without any rights in this relationship, until they themselves become infirm and need to be cared for by the grandchildren, who are often too young and ill prepared to do so.
4. Ca. 50% of the world population is living in poverty on less than US\$2 per day, mainly within a family structure.
5. Increasing migration through conflict, or economic necessities for survival, usually takes place within families.
6. The hunger of humans for knowledge, especially in childhood, youth and early man-and womanhood needs co-ordinated education policies,

These, Mr Chairman, are all issues, which go right to the core of the sustainable development of society, and hence would seem to necessitate policies which have a family orientation, in order to address issues of sustainable development comprehensively and holistically.

The challenging changes in society are usually interwoven with paradigmatic changes in families. For many years family issues have been regarded as problematical areas, which needed support, like another charity. Would it not, Mr. Chairman, be more meaningful instead, to recognise families as the human capital, wealth and resource of society, which they, without dispute, are, and hence regard families as the medium and motor, to attain true social and sustainable development?

We trust that the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004 will re-emphasise the permanence of family issues as central to the work and programmes of the Commission for Social Development. We further trust that the General Assembly of the United Nations will give priority to continue funding for family issues within the Secretariat of the United Nations, which is essential to maintaining collaboration and partnership between governments, International and Civil Society Organisations, for the well-being of families, which is central to the process of social and sustainable development

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, to observe the 10th Anniversary of IYF, The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (DESA) have agreed to set up an Interactive-Internet-Forum, at www.10yearsIYF.org with the support of international NGOs, which are in consultative status with ECOSOC. This has enabled the implementation of a study, under the chairmanship of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, to document the positive contributions of civil society to the well-being of families since IYF in 1994. The results of this study are to be submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2004 (cf. Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly - A/57/139, 2002).

Thank you Mr. Chairman.