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Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

Statement to the 48th Session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development

**The Importance of Family in the
Priority Theme of Social Integration**

Mr. Chairman

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council appreciates the opportunity to address the Commission on Social Development and wishes to emphasize the importance of family in the consideration of the Commission's priority theme of "Social Integration".

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the family as the basic unit of society, entitled to protection by society and the State. Several General Assembly resolutions have emphasized that the family be strengthened and receive comprehensive support.

All people belong to a family. Therefore, when there is a lack of social integration in a society it is not just individuals who are negatively affected but also their families, as well. Social exclusion of individuals results in isolation and marginalization of their families, and can even lead to violence against family members. Too often, these negative effects fall disproportionately on the women and children within families.

The need to strengthen social integration, including through advancing basic social protection in all countries, has become urgent today in the face of the current global financial and economic crises. Many workers and their families are now suffering from social exclusion through job and income losses. There are many families in the world who cannot afford to send their children to school and cannot provide them with proper nutrition and health care. All family members, and particularly women and children are vulnerable to stress and deprivation when the family experiences unemployment by one or more of its breadwinners.

Special attention should be given to families in times of unemployment to alleviate these difficult conditions. Otherwise there will be a deleterious effect on marital life, family

life and children's well being. Socio-economic instability may lead to growing social tension and unrest, jeopardizing social cohesion and the family. There should be national policies that ensure that all family members have adequate economic and social protection during unemployment, ill health, maternity, disability and old age.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has led to a weakening of family and traditional support systems, and stigmas associated with HIV/AIDS has led to the social exclusion of families who have a sick family member.

Mr. Chairman,

Governments should provide for the social integration and social protection for those families who cannot support themselves and to assist people confronted by unforeseen catastrophes whether individual or collective, natural, social or technological.

Governments should provide programs to promote the social integration of families and eradicate family poverty, which is the main cause of child labor and encourage and enable parents to send their children to school.

Governments should provide and ensure protection of working children, in particular street children.

Governments should encourage grass roots organizations to promote the social integration of families and assist and support families in their educational, socializing and nurturing roles. This promotes mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation within the family and within society.

As an example, The Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council has worked in partnership with Romanian Orthodox Church to create an effective program to reach poor families. Social services have been offered to benefit all Romanians. Since 2005 over 2 million Romanians have been educated in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and family violence. The programs have helped the Church to become a key player in providing social services to families and in creating new jobs, improving education and health care.

In Woliso, Ethiopia, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council has worked in partnership with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to prevent the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus. A free medical clinic was constructed as well as a modern clinic for expectant mothers. Workshops were also offered to mothers to improve their families' sanitary habits.

Governments should plan and finance education and health care as a priority for social inclusion and must not depend entirely on donor-funded programs which could reduce national commitments to inclusiveness.

Mr. Chairman,

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council wishes to strongly urge the Commission to consider these key family issues in its final outcome document on social integration.

Thank you.