



**Panel discussion at the 27th session of the Human Rights Council on Protection of the Family**

**Statement by Ignacio Socías – International Federation for Family Development**

**Geneva, September 15th 2014**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to speak today on behalf of IFFD, a Federation of non-governmental, non-denominational, non-profit, independent and private Family Enrichment centers in general consultative status with the ECOSOC. We reach more than 50,000 people every year in 65 countries on the five continents and our mission is to help families around the world; we do not discriminate by race, color, religion, gender, or country of origin.

Taking into account our broad experience in dealing with families worldwide, we see constantly that family is where the vast majority of people learn the fundamental skills for life. But we also need to take into account that “at the most fundamental level, family structure and family process matters: evidence shows that outcomes for both children and adults are not equal regardless of family background, and public policy should reflect this.”<sup>1</sup>

Summarizing the results of 115 different studies, we can say today that “those who build stable families have a higher life expectancy, lower risks of mental illness, alcoholism and domestic violence. With regard to children, they show lower infant mortality rate, lower risk of alcoholism and drug addiction, lower incidences of engaging in criminal activities after puberty, higher academic achievements, lower incidence of mental illnesses and fewer teenage unwanted pregnancies. Some studies also show that from an economic perspective, a stable family is the lowest cost option for both its members and the State. Others have concluded that family breakdown costs the State several billion Euros a year —these figures take the consequences of family breakdown into account as well as the strain it puts on social benefits, social security, social services etc. Furthermore, these studies also suggest that members of stable families are more disciplined when it comes to fulfilling legal and social norms and, therefore, are the ones who best contribute towards financing social security.”<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Chairman,

“Although there is a universal recognition of the importance of the family, there is no formal consensus on its definition which may impede the effective design and implementation of family policy. It is therefore more productive to focus on family functions and to assess the impact of policies from a family-focused perspective.”<sup>3</sup> For this reason, we welcome the recent Resolution of the Human Rights Council that gave origin to this Panel when it says 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.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Centre for Social Justice, ‘Every Family Matters – A Policy Report by the Family Law Review’, Second Edition, August 2010.

Available at: <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/CSJEveryFamilyMattersWEB.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Family Watch, ‘The Sustainable Family’, 2009 Annual Report.

Available at: <http://www.thefamilywatch.org/Report2009.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Concept Note for the Doha International Conference on the Family, 16-17 April 2014.

Available at: <http://www.difi.org.qa/app/wa/ca/fusiondev.fdevent.FDEventDirectAction/viewEventDocument?docId=54>

<sup>4</sup> UN Human Rights Council, ‘Protection of the family’, 25 June 2014 (A/HRC/26/L.20/Rev.1).

Available at: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/26/L.20/Rev.1&Lang=E>

Also, the Economic and Social Council has recently approved a very similar text in a Resolution that has been passed to the General Assembly and will be discussed there on December 3. "The family, as the natural and fundamental group unit of society, has the primary responsibility for the nurturing and protection of children and that children, for the full and harmonious development of their personality, should grow up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding."<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Chairman,

We recognize the long-standing efforts of United Nations to protect human Rights. We know it has empowerment at its core and has been enriched during the past years with the goal of empowering the world's women and empowering the next generation through the work on youth. We feel that adding families to the agenda would be another step forward, provided it includes the removal of all barriers to the active participation of families in society, especially including decisions on investments in health, housing and education. Too often, the time, effort and money families invest in their children finds no social or economic incentive by the society benefitting from them, because there are no political instruments to implement it.

And this step would in return help also women and children, as they are part of the family. We need to realize "the extent to which family breakdown has contributed to the feminization of poverty and the fact that family structure matters in the long term fight against poverty, in particular child poverty. If we are serious about reducing poverty, valuable short term solutions, like food banks and shelters, must partner with long term solutions, which include examining family structure and eradicating family breakdown."<sup>6</sup>

It is because of this reasons that we think we should aim to "promote the integration of a family perspective into policymaking at the national, regional and international levels", which is one of the primary activities of the Focal Point on the Family at United Nations.<sup>7</sup> To implement this perspective in a practical way, the Declaration of the Civil Society on the occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family we have promoted, co-sponsored by more than 250 NGOs from the five continents, notes "the opportunity it provides to revisit family-oriented policies as part of overall development efforts, supporting its objective to aim at responding to challenges faced by families and continuing to guide national efforts that benefit families worldwide and to integrate a family perspective by introducing a family impact report or assessment as a standing and compulsory part of policymaking."<sup>8</sup>

Also, we believe that the logical consequence would be for the post 2015 development agenda. The Resolution of the ECOSOC already mentioned points out the importance of "the role of the family as a contributor to sustainable development and the need to strengthen family policy development in their ongoing efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, the Millennium Development Goals and future United Nations development goals."

In consequence, if promotion of sustainable development can't be set aside from empowering families, they should be also part of the future Development Goals. As the UN Secretary-General has mentioned in another one of his Reports, "the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (that we are celebrating in 2014,) on the eve of the target year of the Millennium Development Goals, gives us an opportunity to refocus on the role of families in development... The Millennium Development targets, especially those relating to the reduction of poverty, education of children and reduction in maternal mortality, are difficult to attain unless the strategies to achieve them focus on the family ... In effect, the very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals."<sup>9</sup>

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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<sup>5</sup> UN Economic and Social Council, 'Observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond', 8 August 2014 (E/RES/2014/8).  
Available at: <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=E/RES/2014/8>

<sup>6</sup> Andrea Mrozek and Rebecca Walberg, 'Private choices, public costs: How failing families cost us all', Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, 2009.  
Available at: [http://www.imfcanada.org/sites/default/files/Cost%20of%20Family%20Breakdown%20final\\_0.pdf](http://www.imfcanada.org/sites/default/files/Cost%20of%20Family%20Breakdown%20final_0.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs website, Mission Statement for the Focal Point on the Family.  
Available at: <http://undesadspd.org/Family.aspx>.

<sup>8</sup> Declaration of the Civil Society on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family  
Available at: <http://www.familyperspective.org/act/act-0012-en.php>.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, 'Follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond', Report of the Secretary-General, 29 November 2010 (A/66/62-E/2011/4).  
Available at: <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/66/62>