



## *The Family in the International bodies* Ignacio Socías

The clear advance of IFFD's role within the United Nations –as is the case with other international organizations as well– is a response to an innovative concept: we consider the family to be a 'meeting point' in which consensus can be reached to allow us to work together without being limited by an instrumentalization of the family which attempts to impose its religious or ideological beliefs. This 'meeting point' is based on evidence, not just opinion; in other words, it is 'evidence-based', rather than 'ideology-based'.

This approach is based on a deeply held conviction: we work with people from different backgrounds who act in good faith and who respect the path that each person has chosen to take toward the truth. We are not afraid of reality, rather we actively search it out and observe it in order to gain a better and more complete understanding of what the family is. In order to do this, we use data provided by scientific research and we don't make assumptions. We want to discover the beauty of the family for ourselves.

Until relatively recently, a quick look at the panorama of civil society organizations showed something very different: religious groups and political ideology have tended to create extreme and irreconcilable positions, which, in fact, have only served to prevent advances in this area during the previous decades. Discussions and arguments over the definition of 'family', and what should or should not be included within this definition, have ended up holding back or preventing many well-intentioned efforts. We are very happy to see that, thanks to a lot of hard work by many different people with the same experience as us, the situation is changing.

In short, what we need to do is discover what kind of family really 'works', in the sense of making couples happier, giving children a better upbringing, and producing more general wellbeing in society. While it is true that all types of family and social structure are worthy of respect, they do not all offer the same benefits.

What do we aim at? We think that the effort they have been making for so long to protect human rights, focusing primarily on women and young people, could be improved even further by adding the family as a political priority, particularly in matters such as investment in health, housing and education. This step would also help women and young people –who, naturally, form part of the family–, given that family break-ups have contributed to the feminization of poverty. We should also remember that family structure matters in the long-term fight against child poverty. The logical consequence would be to promote –in the development area, which is the center of activity for the United Nations– "a conducive environment to strengthen and support all families, recognizing that equality between women and men and respect for all the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all family members are essential to family well-being and to society at large, noting the importance of reconciliation of work and family life, and recognizing the principle of shared parental responsibility for the upbringing and development of

the child” [‘Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family’, A/67/142].

In conclusion, the vast majority of political and civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector are starting to realize that the family is not only “the natural and fundamental group unit of society” [Resolution of the Human Rights Council, 25 June 2014], but also the main agent of sustainable, social, economic and cultural growth. 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”.