

UPF New York, USA Observes the 25th UN International Day of Families

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New York, United States -- A large audience gathered at the UN headquarters to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the International Day of Families.

The co-sponsorship of this event, held on May 15, 2019, in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) chamber, was significant. First, it was co-sponsored by the UN Group of Friends of the Family, a coalition of 25 pro-family UN member states. In addition, at least 18 UN NGOs, including the Universal Peace Federation, co-sponsored this family-affirming event. All co-sponsors reaffirm that the family is entitled to protection by society and the state, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The International Day of Families was initiated in 1994 as a UN resolution calling on governments, civil society, and international agencies to focus on "creating among governments, policymakers, and the public a greater awareness of the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society." This gathering certainly raised the awareness of the critical role of the natural family.

The first panel of dignitaries was opened by Mr. Valentine Rybykov, the permanent representative of the Republic of Belarus. He stated that as the family forms the moral foundation of society, preserves cultural identities, and shapes children into pro-social citizens, it is the starting point to reduce poverty and climate change and must be strengthened and protected.

Mr. Jassim Sayar Al-Maawda, chargé d'affaires and deputy permanent representative of the State of Qatar, explained that the centrality of the family is enshrined in the Qatar constitution and that the nation's pro-family policies have had a measurable positive impact on women and families.

Mr. Tarek Tayed, counselor and permanent representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, pointed out how each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, such as poverty, education and gender equality, is more likely to be accomplished when the family is strong.

Mr. Tareq Ariful Islam, chargé d'affaires and deputy permanent representative of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, reminded us that the family is the essential educator, caregiver, and economic provider, especially for children, the elderly, and the disabled. He added that Bangladesh has been able to address the threat of radicalization through the influence of the family.

Ms. Valerie Huber, senior policy advisor at the Office of Global Affairs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, spoke. She opened by affirming President Trump's conviction that the family, not the government, provides our most fundamental social stability and is, therefore, the core to future prosperity and well-being. She referred to the decades of research that confirms that the healthy family promotes optimal physical, emotional, spiritual, and social health for all its members.

Monsignor Tomasz Grysa, first counselor and deputy permanent observer of the Holy See, commented that as God created male and female in the image of God, marriage and the family are the natural environments for the experience of love. The family is closely related to peace, he said, because in our

familial relations we learn to respect every person and become builders of peace. Msgr. Grysa added that life without love is senseless but life with the experience of familial love will expand to goodness and love given out to the world. He stated that the past 50 years of family degradation leading to increased poverty, dependence on government welfare, single motherhood, etc., must be met with 50 years dedicated to restoring the centrality of parenting and strengthening the family.

As an unusual musical interlude, five young women performed enchanting harp selections together. The beauty of their music created perhaps some of the most soothing and peaceful moments felt at the United Nations.

The next panel session was composed of speakers from civil society. Christine Vollmer, the president of Alliance for the Family, from Venezuela, related how she addressed a rapid increase of violence, drugs, irresponsible sexual behavior, and aimlessness in Venezuelan youth by developing a family-based character and relationship education program, "Alive to the World." She reported that this integrated approach to youth education has brought about an increase in healthy decision-making among youth and improved parent-child connections in many countries in Latin America.

Mr. Errol Naidoo, the founder and CEO of Family Policy Institute, spoke about the breakdown of family, high rate of single motherhood, and floundering of youth in South Africa. He attributed much of the social decline and dilemmas in that nation to the weakening of the family. Mr. Naidoo encouraged us by saying that policies that focus on the family can bring a substantial turnaround in social stability.

Michael Hanby, a PhD at the John Paul Institute for Marriage and Family at Catholic University of America and an associate professor of religion and philosophy of science, reflected on the previously "unimaginable" phenomena brought about by the combined sexual and technological revolutions. He remarked that the current fluid concepts about marriage, male/female indistinguishability, gender identity, and reproductive and sexual rights have led to abuses such as human womb trafficking, children with no knowledge of their biological parentage, and arbitrary destruction of frozen human embryos. Dr. Hanby noted that today we see a redefinition of human nature itself. At the same time, he said, the control of fundamental decisions about children's and women's rights, human life, and social responsibilities has slipped away from the state into the hands of bureaucratic and commercial technology.

Dr. Joseph Price, an associate professor in the Department of Economics, Brigham Young University, discussed the impact of marriage on the economy. He referred to recent research indicating that a 1 percent increase in marriage brings about a 6 percent increase in GDP. He added that it costs governments \$43,000 to replace the family and that the states with higher rates of marriage had higher GDP. He stated, "Higher levels of marriage are strongly correlated with greater levels of upward economic mobility, lower levels of child poverty, and higher median family income." Dr. Price explained that even though cohabitation has increased around the world, these unions lead to reduced emotional and economic stability. Despite Sweden's wide acceptance of cohabitation, the breakup rate within five years is 79 percent for cohabitants, throwing children into emotional and financial uncertainty.

For the final segment, 12 UN NGOs gave three-minute statements to the audience. Statements were given by the two organizing NGOs: the Center for Family and Human Rights, and Family Watch International. Some of the other organizations that gave statements were the Heritage Foundation, International Organization for the Family, United Family International, and the Universal Peace Federation.

The UPF statement, given by Lynn Walsh, emphasized research affirming that married biological mothers and fathers provide their children with the greatest benefits on every level of well-being. Mrs. Walsh made a more personal reflection as an adoptive parent with her husband. She said, "Adoptive parents can be wonderful substitutes, but it is not the ideal. My husband and I adopted two wonderful boys, now loving, successful young men. But I know from experience that no child should ever have to wonder about the biological roots of their identity, if at all avoidable."

The International Day of Families anniversary commemoration was without a doubt highly successful. Special appreciation should be given to the UN Group of the Friends of the Family, the Center for Family and Human Rights, and Family Watch International for organizing the program. Such collaboration brought unity, new resources, inspiration and surely will bring future accomplishments around the world for the sake of the family.