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the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Association of United Families International, International Solidarity and Human Rights Institute, Universal Peace Federation, Women’s Federation for World Peace International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The family assures greater opportunities for development and advancement of rural girls and women

Girls and women in the most disadvantaged situations of poor rural areas are at greatest risk when their family is unstable or broken. Solo mothers and their children are clearly the most disadvantaged in rural communities.

An approach that recognizes the family as a unique resource for overcoming challenges, or a family-capital approach, offers potential benefits not commonly considered for the betterment of females on the most basic and practical level, a girl will be better provided for and protected when her mother and father cooperatively combine their capacities and energies for the well-being of the family.

Programs and policies which include strengthening the family while addressing hunger, poverty, education, or health have been shown to have more sustainability and impact. For instance, rural agricultural programs that address the whole family have been shown to result in greater family farm productivity than programs that focus only on women. In terms of gender equality, family-focused farming increases men's involvement in agricultural productivity, bringing some relief to women, who more commonly perform most of the work involved in growing food for their family. With increased productivity and profitability of family farms, parents will have the funds to send their children to school and seek health care for their family. Remember, a government may build a school or hospital, but it is only with the parents' effort and sacrifice that their children actually will get there. A productive and cooperative couple is more likely to ensure that their daughters receive education, not only their sons.

The effort to strengthen the family can not only be more effective but also can enhance mutual gender respect. It has been shown that programs addressing community hygiene, HIV/AIDS or domestic abuse which include strengthening couple communication are more effective, as they encourage couple team-building, respect, and understanding. Furthermore, a family-capital approach creates a culture of gender equality and complementarity within the family, as the parents' mutual respect is modelled for the children in day-to-day life. This healthy modelling by parents can help erase gender discrimination and abusive patterns of past generations.

In terms of psychological well-being, children require consistent and responsible emotional responsiveness from their primary caretakers for optimal development. Research has shown that a stable relationship between the mother and father increases overall parental effectiveness. Girls experiencing secure attachment with their parents and stability in the home have a greater sense of self-worth, self-discipline and the social skills necessary for overcoming obstacles and making successful life choices. Sadly, girls growing up in disadvantaged areas are at far greater risk without a protective, supportive father and mother.

In conclusion, parental unity and family cohesion are powerhouses for solving some of our most intractable problems. The family is an irreplaceable and natural resource for optimal human advancement and it must be part of our strategy for the advancement of all women. In fact, the healthy family is the entry point for truly sustainable solutions in human relations because it models mutual respect, commitment, responsibility, and love for every individual, every woman and man, every girl, and boy.