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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to 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, Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, and Universal Peace Federation, 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

How will we know we are attaining our goals for all women around the world as delineated by the Beijing Conference and the Sustainable Development Goals? Healthy partnerships between men and women are essential for sustainable solutions for all of the discrimination, disadvantages, and violence against women. Mutually respectful, cooperative relationships between men and women should be a clear measurement of achievement.

The World Conferences on Women have reaffirmed the need for these partnerships in the home. For example, paragraph 15 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action says that equal sharing and a harmonious partnership between men and women are critical to their well-being and that of their families. These full partnerships of which the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action speaks are best started, formed, and established within a stable and loving marriage and family.

Any abuse within the family needs to be addressed and extinguished, but ignoring the family is deleterious to optimal human development and sustainable gender harmony. Strengthening the family and fostering this essential family capital has not been focused on enough in the follow-up to Beijing. Emphasis needs to be placed on the unique value of the thriving family for healing and building cooperation and mutual respect between men and women. The family is the seedbed where appreciation and complementarity of the gifts of men and women are cultivated in unity and manifested for children and society to emulate.

Studies around the world show that healthy family environments decrease the risk of poverty, abuse, and discrimination for women. Healthy families also reduce child malnutrition, stuntedness, and morbidity. Furthermore, healthy families increase the chances that women and children will experience greater mental and physical health and the attainment of education and employment. It is important to note that each of these areas relates to accomplishing other Sustainable Development Goals.

For these reasons, we encourage exploration of best practices, programs, and policies, which increase flourishing, complementary male-female relationships in the home. As described in paragraph 60 of the Beijing +5 document, the family is the basic unit of society and a strong force for social cohesion and integration, and as such should be strengthened.

Social science has given us evidence of why stable families are critical for human development. Culturally sensitive programs around the globe have shown that couples and families can learn how to build cooperation, understanding, and mutual support. Numerous countries have found approaches that encourage couples' commitment and increase stability, fidelity, and happiness within their families. Certainly, as the healthy family fosters gender harmony and impacts all of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Beijing +5 Declaration is correct in saying that the time to strengthen the family unit has come.
