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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment
and decent work for all**

Statement submitted by Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, a non-governmental organization in special 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.



Statement

Focus on the family

As the Commission for Social Development commences work at its fifty-second session, in 2014, during the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, we believe that a focus on the family is required in the context of the challenges presented in the priority theme of “promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all”.

In his 2010 report on the follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond, the Secretary-General observed: that the majority of the Millennium Development targets, especially those relating to the reduction of poverty, education of children and reduction in maternal mortality, were difficult to attain unless the strategies to achieve them focused on the family ([A/66/62-E/2011/4](#), para. 7).

The International Year of the Family was a landmark event in 2004, in which the international community focused on the family as never before. In July 2004, as preparations were under way for the General Assembly observance of the anniversary, the Secretary-General pointed out that so far, the family had been woefully overlooked as the key to development, stating that families had major, albeit often untapped potential to contribute to national development and to the achievement of major objectives of every society and of the United Nations, including the eradication of poverty and the creation of just, stable and secure societies ([A/59/176](#), para. 4).

During the observance, on 6 December 2004, the Secretary-General declared that the family must not be forgotten as a vital partner in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the many other objectives set by the international community during the past decade. Delegates from around the globe then arose to affirm the pivotal role of the family.

Bangladesh, for example, stated that the family was the natural and fundamental unit of society, and had been so since time immemorial, as recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that it remained as valid as when the Declaration had been adopted. The representative stated that all economic and social programmes must also bear in mind that the attainment of each of the Millennium Development Goals must begin with the family and that the family was the main instrument of societal transformation.

The United States of America noted that the family was the foundation of the social order, the bedrock of nations and the bastion of civilization. The representative stated that the family was a universal and irreplaceable community rooted in human nature and the basis of all societies at all times and that, as the cradle of life and love for each new generation, the family was the primary source of personal identity, self-esteem and support for children. It was also the first and foremost school of life, uniquely suited to teaching children integrity, character, morals, responsibility, service and wisdom.

Mexico remarked that it firmly believed that the family was a valid and vital institution that would continue to be the fundamental institution of civilization, the great generator of social capital and thus the key strength of Mexico and the world.

China asserted that in ancient times, Chinese sages had advocated the philosophy of family harmony leading to good Government and, in turn, to universal peace. The saying that prosperity followed family harmony had been a motto for every family in China seeking happiness.

Benin expressed the notion that the family had a vital role to play in sustainable development at the individual, community and national levels, that for generations, particularly in Africa, it had been a bastion of strength, an anchor, a frame of reference and a source of identity for people, and that in the event of crises, such as unemployment, illness, poverty, old age or distress, the majority of Africans relied on the family as the main source of material, social and emotional support and of social security.

The Holy See expressed that it was within the primary natural community of the family that individuals acquired a number of qualities, areas of knowledge and attitudes that enabled them one day to be productive and thus constructive creators of society. It was not simply a question of bringing children into the world but of rearing them well. The economic concept of human capital was especially relevant in that regard. As the primary place where human capital was shaped, the family was truly indispensable to development.

Indonesia added that strong families not only contributed to the good order of society but also represented an untapped contributor to society's economic and social development. To play the diverse roles of which it was capable, the family must therefore benefit from the widest possible protection and assistance to build its capacity for action.

Such widespread testimony to the power of the family is corroborated by the work of leading scholars, including Maria Sophia Aguirre of the Catholic University of America, in *The Family in the New Millennium: World Voices Supporting the "Natural" Clan*; and Michael Novak, a former professor at Stanford University and representative of the United States to the Commission on Human Rights.

The Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society is proud to be a co-publisher with the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development of *The Family and the Millennium Development Goals: Using Family Capital to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, a book launched at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 14 May 2012. In the chapter focusing on the first Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals, Juastus Suchi Obadiah of Kenya noted that the eradication of poverty must begin at the family level and that the family was important in poverty eradication because it was the basic unit of society, the first school of life. It might be the only school where no one graduated. It was life-long.

The introduction of the book contains a message from Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser of Qatar, in which she described the international community as focusing significant attention on achieving the Millennium Development Goals and that achieving them was important, particularly in times of economic stress. Unfortunately, however, policymakers and members of civil society had not focused on one of the more important modalities for success: the family unit. Significant

research had developed over the past four decades showing that the family was a central component of individual, social and economic development.

It is not the first time that Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser of Qatar has called world attention to the family. Years earlier she proclaimed that safeguarding the family, as noted in article 16(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was a prerequisite for promoting national progress and that, accordingly, there was an urgent need for a new mentality to see the family as part of the solution rather than part of the problem. In other words, what was required was a mentality that did not treat the family as an impediment to social progress and development, but rather as the driving force behind it.

As the delegates to the 2014 Commission for Social Development undertake their important work, we believe that the challenges presented can effectively be addressed only by, in the words of the Secretary-General, focusing on the family. The family truly is the driving force behind development and is the very key to poverty eradication, social integration, and prosperity.
