



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-sixth session

14–25 March 2022

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 American Family Association of New York, Association of United Families International, Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, Real Women of Canada, Universal Peace Federation, and Worldwide Organization for Women, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Empowerment and Risk Reduction: What the Wise Drafters of UDHR Knew**

#### **Guiding Principles for the Commission on the Status of Women 66**

As the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women addresses the priority theme of “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes,” we call attention to the provision in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which stands out for its acknowledgment of “the only right in the Declaration that specifically devolves to a group rather than an individual.” (Glenn Mitoma, “Charles H. Malik and Human Rights: Notes on a Biography,” *Biography* 33.1 (Winter 2010), 226.)

That unique group was recognized in article 16(3) as the foundation of civilization itself: “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” The implications for the work of Commission on the Status of Women 66 are profound: empowerment of women and girls begins in the family, and the most effective risk reduction policy is to strengthen the family.

The drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights knew of the universal primacy of the natural family. According to human rights lawyer and judge Manfred Nowak, the phrase “natural and fundamental group unit of society” was intended “to emphasize that despite various traditions and social structures, a pillar of all societies is the family as the smallest group unit.” The influential Lebanese delegate Charles Malik, for example, emphasized that of all the social groups, only “the family deriving from marriage is the natural and fundamental group unit of society” and is “the cradle of all human rights and liberties” (Johannes Morsink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, and Intent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 254.) Why this is so was explained decades later by another delegate to the Commission on Human Rights, US Ambassador Michael Novak.

“The family is the seedbed of economic skills, money habits, attitudes toward work, and the arts of financial independence. The family is a stronger agency of educational success than the school. The family is a stronger teacher of the religious imagination than the church. Political and social planning in a wise social order begins with the axiom What strengthens the family strengthens society.... The roles of a father and a mother, and of children with respect to them, is the absolutely critical center of social force” (Michael Novak, “The Family Out of Favor,” *Harper’s*, April 1976, pp. 42–43.)

The family is also the critical center of sustainable development, as emphasized in the Doha Declaration: “The family is not only the fundamental group unit of society, but is also the fundamental agent for sustainable social, economic and cultural development.” (Doha Declaration.)

No wonder that when the family fails, society collapses, as also noted by Michael Novak: “Throughout history, nations have been able to survive a multiplicity of disasters – invasions, famines, earthquakes, epidemics, depressions – but they have never been able to survive the disintegration of the family” (Michael Novak, “The Family Out of Favor,” *Harper’s*, April 1976, pp. 42–43.)

No wonder that over a hundred national constitutions echo Universal Declaration of Human Rights 16(3) with various descriptions of the family such as

“the basis of the nation’s survival” (Hungary), “the cornerstone of the preservation and the advancement of the Nation” (Greece), “the fundamental basis of society” (El Salvador), “the nucleus of society” (Qatar), “the basic institution of society” (Colombia), “the basic structure of society” (Tunisia), “the fundamental pillar of the society” (Afghanistan), and “the natural foundation of human society” (Cameroon).

And no wonder that Pope Francis declared, “Every threat to the family is a threat to society itself.... Protect your families! See in them your country’s greatest treasure and nourish them always” (Address of His Holiness Pope Francis,” Manila, 16 January 2015.)

To achieve the greatest empowerment of women and girls, as well as the most effective risk reduction policy possible, we urge that the work of Commission on the Status of Women 66 honor the treaty obligation in article 10.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society.

Respectfully endorsed by these civil society organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC:

American Family Association of New York  
Association of United Families International  
Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society  
Real Women of Canada  
Universal Peace Federation  
Worldwide Organization for Women.