



Statement by His Excellency Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
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Geneva, 24 June 2014

Mr. President,

My Delegation supports the importance given by the United Nations to the twentieth anniversary observance of the International Year of the Family. This significant event was recently highlighted in a special way, on 15 May 2014, during the International Day of Families, under the theme: *“Families Matter for the Achievement of Development Goals”*. Surely, the choice of this theme had a strong relationship to Resolution 2012/10, adopted by ECOSOC that stressed the need *“for undertaking concerted actions to strengthen family-centered policies and programs as part of an integrated, comprehensive approach to development”*; and that invited States, civil society organizations and academic institutions *“to continue providing information on their activities in support of the objectives of and preparations for the twentieth anniversary.”*

This Council is well aware, Mr. President, of the strong debates held in this very chamber about the nature and definition of the family. Such discussions often lead States to conclude that the family is more of a problem than a resource to society. Even the United Nations materials prepared for the observance of this Anniversary Year stated: *“Owing to rapid socio-economic and demographic transformations, families find it more and more difficult to fulfill their numerous responsibilities.”*¹ My Delegation believes that despite past or even current challenges, the family, in fact, is the fundamental unit of human society. It continually exhibits a vigor much greater than that of the many forces that have tried to eliminate it as a relic of the past, or an obstacle to the emancipation of the individual, or to the creation of a freer, egalitarian and happy society.

The family and society, which are mutually linked by vital and organic bonds, have complementary functions in the defense and advancement of the good of every person and of humanity.² The dignity and rights of the individual are not diminished by the attention given to the family. On the contrary, most people find unique protection, nurture, and dynamic energy from their membership in a strong and healthy family founded upon marriage between a man and a woman. Moreover, ample

¹ <http://undesadspd.org/Family/InternationalObservances/TwentiethAnniversaryofIYF2014.aspx>

² Pontifical Council for the Family, *“Charter on the Rights of the Family,”* 1983, <file:///Users/BobNewMBP/Documents/Pontifical%20Council%20for%20the%20Family/Charter%20of%20the%20Rights%20of%20the%20Family,%2022%20October%201983%C2%A0.webarchive>

evidence has demonstrated that the best interest of the child is assured in a harmonious family environment in which the education and formation of children develop within the context of lived experience with both male and female parental role models.

The family is the fundamental cell of society where the generations meet, love, educate, and support each other, and pass on the gift of life, “where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another.”³ This understanding of the family has been embraced throughout history by all cultures. Thus, with good reason the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized unique, profound, and uncompromising rights and duties for the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman, by declaring as follows: “(1) *Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.* (2) *Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.* (3) *The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.*”

Mr. President, during this historic anniversary observance, the Holy See Delegation firmly maintains that the family is a whole and integral unit, which should not be divided or marginalized. The family and marriage need to be defended and promoted not only by the State but also by the whole of society. Both require the decisive commitment of every person because it is starting from the family and marriage that a complete answer can be given to the *challenges* of the present and the *risks* of the future.⁴ The way forward is indicated in the fundamental human rights and related conventions that ensure the universality of these rights and whose binding value need to be preserved and promoted by the International Community.

³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, #66, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

⁴ Pontifical Council for the Family, “The Family and Human Rights”, 2000, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_20001115_family-human-rights_en.html