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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: rethinking and strengthening social
development in the contemporary world**

**Statement submitted by Alliance Defending Freedom, Centro de
Estudio y Formación Integral de la Mujer, Misión Mujer, Mujer
para la Mujer and Observatorio Regional para la Mujer de
América Latina y el Caribe, 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.



Statement

Alliance Defending Freedom is a not-for-profit international legal alliance of more than 2,400 lawyers dedicated to the protection of fundamental human rights. It has been involved in over 500 cases before national and international forums, including the supreme courts of the United States of America, Argentina, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and India, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. It has also provided expert testimony before several European parliaments, as well as the European Parliament and the Congress of the United States. It is accredited with the Economic and Social Council, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union (the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the European Parliament).

Misión Mujer is a non-governmental organization with 15 years of experience working for and with adolescents through preventive programmes and policy advocacy at the local, national and international levels.

Centro de Estudio y Formación Integral de la Mujer is an organization that works to promote respect for human and cultural values that strengthen the dignity of women, mainly through the organization of conferences, seminars and courses in Mexico and the United States.

Observatorio Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe is a civil society organization that seeks to observe the reality of Latin American women from a multidimensional perspective and that coordinates efforts with public and private institutions interested in contributing to the well-being and development of women.

Mujer para la Mujer works to promote the fundamental human rights of women, with a special focus on improving the lives of rural women of the various indigenous communities in Mexico.

In the light of this year's theme, "Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world", we call upon Member States at the fifty-third session of the Commission for Social Development to reaffirm the immutability of human rights, with a particular focus on the vital role of the family. As recognized in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the family, as "the basic unit of society", "plays a key role in social development and as such should be strengthened".

Intact families are the most powerful vehicle for strengthening social development. Specifically, recent studies have shown that intact families are causally linked with a reduction in poverty. Where families are intact, there is an increase in social mobility, health, political engagement and school attendance, all of which contribute to wealth. Where families are broken, there is an increase in substance abuse, violence, teenage pregnancies and crime, all of which perpetuate poverty. In order to promote and protect intact families, Governments must support and safeguard the institution of marriage.

Marriage, the oldest and most fundamental human institution, is the foundation of the family. Studies consistently suggest that families headed by a married couple, where children live with both of their biological parents, enjoy the highest levels of well-being. Indicators of well-being include education, physical security, depth of relationships between children and parents, sexual and reproductive health, mental

health, physical health, income, the absence of addiction and employment. Unfortunately, statistics show that marriage is on the decline, while, simultaneously, divorce rates are increasing. These changes have contributed to an increase in the percentage of children born to unmarried women and thus to a decrease in the percentage of children raised in intact families. To protect the institution of the family, Member States should implement policies that encourage marriage, promote marriage as the context for procreation and discourage divorce.

We commend the Commission for its focus on strengthening the family and the commitment made by Member States to “foster policies that enable people to combine their paid work with their family responsibilities.” (Copenhagen Declaration, commitment 3). As the family and the workforce are both vital for society to flourish, Member States should carefully implement policies that advance both institutions, while ensuring that the promotion of one does not lead to the weakening of the other. In the same way that strong families lead to strong economies, strong economies, by way of the workplace, should empower families by providing them with a means to meet their basic needs and to contribute meaningfully to society. In addition, in order for families to thrive both in the workplace and at home, Member States should follow through on their commitment to emphasize the shared responsibility of men and women in the care of children (Copenhagen Declaration, commitment 5).

Supporting healthy family development is essential to strengthening social development. In rethinking and strengthening social development in today’s world, we ask Member States to implement policies that direct resources efficiently towards strengthening families. Such policies include support for healthy marriages and stable families rather than other structures, recognition of the family as a means to eradicate poverty, and business practices that allow mothers and fathers to flourish both in their careers and in raising their children.

Conclusion

We celebrate the attention that has been given to strengthening the family since the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration. Strong families are the backbone of strong communities and, ultimately, strong nations. It is in the context of the family that children first learn to trust others and where they develop a sense of solidarity. When the family structure is broken, children feel vulnerable in settings where they should feel secure and experience isolation in settings where they should experience solidarity. When nations fail to implement policies that direct resources efficiently towards strengthening families, sustainability is hampered and poverty is perpetuated. Therefore, we call upon Member States to implement policies that promote individuals to both form and maintain families. Fostering a culture where families remain intact contributes not only to the empowerment of individuals but also to the advancement of society as a whole.
