



SDGS and the Impact of Megatrends on Families: Perspectives from Asia
Side-event during the 57th Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development
Wednesday, May 1, 2024 – 1.15-2.30 PM – UN Headquarters NYC – Conference Room 9

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[1719 words – 13.2 minutes]

I

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, allow me to update you on the recent activities of my Federation in light of this occasion. Although our work covers all five continents, Asia has gained special prominence in recent months, primarily through our World Congress and the Expert Group Meeting we have organized with UN DESA and DIFI.

To this end, allow me to start with the fundamentals of that work. Right from the start, we've been all in on the importance of this International Year. Looking back at the somewhat low-key celebrations of its tenth anniversary in 2004, we made the choice to step it up for the twentieth and now the thirtieth anniversary.

It's worth stressing the main idea laid out in the United Nations resolution that kicked off the International Year – recognizing how crucial it is to give “special attention” to families. This idea is at the heart of everything we have done.

We're not just about being “family-friendly” for appearances' sake. We're about real fairness and equality. We've had our doubts about the term “family-friendly” because it kind of waters down the serious impact family-focused policies can have on society.

Understanding how important families are to society means we can't just see their well-being as a personal preference. It's a matter of justice and making sure everyone gets a fair shot. Moreover, with the upcoming Second World Social Summit marking the thirtieth anniversary of the Copenhagen Declaration, social justice is more crucial than ever.

The link between looking out for families and upholding human rights and freedoms is very clear. Sadly, lots of people are still having their basic rights violated because society doesn't value families as it should. Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drives this point home. When you look at what's going on around the world, it's obvious that the right to start a family is still a struggle for many, especially women and young people on the margins.

This is why at the core of our advocacy is understanding how the goals of the Copenhagen Declaration and the International Year go hand in hand, especially when it comes to tackling poverty, creating jobs, and bringing people together. These are all part of making sure families are taken care of, and it has always taken all of us working together to make it happen.

As you know, to mark the 30th anniversary, the General Assembly outlined four big trends that have been getting a lot of attention over the past four years. These included how family life is affected by things like technology, city living, population changes, and climate change.

II

Knowing how important it is to deal with these trends head-on, especially with everything going on with the pandemic, we've set up online focus groups to dive deep into each topic. The aim was to create useful content that not only informs but also gives families practical advice they can use.

In addition to these efforts, we have actively collaborated in convening a series of United Nations Expert Group Meetings of both regional and global significance. They include a meeting on the Arab region in Cairo, a meeting of Latin American experts in Mexico, another on North America in Orlando, another one on Europe in Torun, and the one for Asia, with experts from 12 Asian countries in Kuala Lumpur.

This last meeting focused on the interlinkages between migration, urbanization, new technologies, demographic trends, and climate change in Asia. The conclusions highlight that these links are complex and interconnected, shaping the region's social, economic, and environmental landscapes. They are the following.

1. Migration patterns in Asia are influenced by factors such as economic opportunities, political instability, and environmental pressures. The rapid urbanization has led to the growth of cities and megacities, attracting migrants from rural areas and neighboring countries, straining urban infrastructure and services, contributing to issues like overcrowding, inadequate housing, and environmental degradation.
2. New technologies play a dual role in migration and urbanization. On one hand, advancements in transportation and communication have facilitated migration and urbanization by reducing barriers to mobility and enhancing connectivity between rural and urban areas. On the other hand, technology-driven industries and smart city initiatives have transformed urban landscapes, creating new employment opportunities and improving urban living standards while also exacerbating disparities and displacing marginalized communities.
3. Demographic trends, including population growth, aging populations, and changing family structures, further influence migration and urbanization patterns. High population density in urban areas puts pressure on resources and infrastructure, while aging populations pose challenges for healthcare systems and social welfare policies.
4. Climate change adds another layer of complexity to migration, urbanization, and demographic trends. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and sea-level rise threaten coastal cities and vulnerable communities, leading to displacement and migration. Urbanization exacerbates climate change through increased carbon emissions and environmental degradation, while demographic shifts affect vulnerability and resilience to climate-related risks.

The final recommendations from this Expert Group Meeting include, among others, the following:

1. On demography, help families stick together by having better childcare, shorter work times, more flexible schedules, and teaching parents how to raise kids.
2. On technological change, make sure everyone can use technology to make families happier, but make sure it's worth the cost.

3. On urbanization, plan making cities smarter and greener, using new ways to build, and using technology to make things better.
4. On international migration, make it easier for families to stay together and help each other, no matter where they come from.
5. On climate change, teach families how to be ready for bad things that might happen in the future, like floods and fires, by sharing information and getting ready for them.

This Expert Group Meeting in Asia is just an example of the 28 events we have participated at IFFD to prepare this 30th anniversary's observance. They have encompassed not only expert meetings, but also awareness-raising gatherings aimed at underscoring the pivotal role of families in societal progress.

The recent IFFD World Congress has precisely happened in Asia, specifically in Cebu, Philippines. It attracted over 1,300 delegates, underscoring the global resonance of our initiatives. During this gathering, we personally reaffirmed the profound extent to which families seek guidance and innovative solutions across various domains.

Conversations during the congress highlighted a notable gap in understanding regarding the nexus between family dynamics and climate change. This underscores the significance of our institutional position and the importance of educational initiatives to bridge this knowledge deficit.

Drawing from these experiences, we want to emphasize the paramount importance of prioritizing quality over quantity in such endeavors. A notable illustration of this principle occurred last year when we deliberated on orchestrating an event in Paris aimed at influencing societal discourse preceding this year's anniversary celebration. After careful consideration, we opted to convene a select group comprising influential figures such as journalists, politicians, and social leaders. This culminated in a substantive three-hour dialogue akin to the present one, elucidating key issues and soliciting invaluable insights.

III

But that's not all. Since 2019, we've been working with non-governmental organizations to create a new Civil Society Declaration. It's already finished and lots of organizations from all over the world have joined in.

We want to give a shoutout to some organizations that helped with the Declaration, like Generations United from the US, the Hungarian Large Families Association, the Doha International Family Institute, the European Parents and Carers at Home, HARO from Sweden, and the European Large Families Confederation.

Our main goal is to make sure politicians understand what families need, especially with the big challenges they face throughout the world. We've come up with eleven recommendations to help guide them. I won't go into detail here, but I'll give you a quick overview before I finish.

1. Facilitating intergenerational open communication: It is imperative to foster open channels of communication between parents and children, underpinned by family resilience and a balanced approach to technology use, acknowledging both its benefits and pitfalls.
2. Addressing the Intergenerational Digital Gap: Efforts must be directed towards bridging the intergenerational digital gap within families, through policies and programs fostering solidarity,

recognition of interdependence, equitable access to education, intergenerational mentoring, and positive intra-family interactions.

3. Establishing technological flexibility in workplaces: Initiatives should be undertaken to promote the use of new technologies in fostering flexibility in workplace design, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by women in the labor market and the imperative of accommodating parenthood.

4. Fostering climate change awareness and adaptation: Strategies need to be developed to help families comprehend the ramifications of climate change on their livelihoods, emphasizing aspects such as food security, housing, infrastructure, and social protection policies.

5. Recognizing family reunification's role in immigrant integration: The benefits of family reunification in fostering immigrant integration should be recognized and leveraged, acknowledging its pivotal role in facilitating the integration of immigrants into host societies.

6. Designing an urban planning responsive to family needs: Urban planning should prioritize the creation of spaces that are responsive to the needs of families, encompassing considerations such as accessibility, green spaces, and amenities catering to diverse family demographics.

7. Investing in early childhood development: Investment in early childhood development and education is paramount, recognizing the profound impact of early experiences on neural development and lifelong outcomes.

8. Promoting parental education and support: Programs aimed at enhancing parental efficacy and support should be prioritized, encompassing initiatives such as positive parenting programs and educational interventions tailored to parental needs.

9. Expanding youth social integration: Efforts should be directed towards addressing the challenges faced by young people in achieving social integration, including barriers to independent living, family formation, employment, and housing.

10. Valuing unpaid care work: The socioeconomic contribution of unpaid care work should be acknowledged and valued, aligning with the objectives of gender equality and sustainable development.

11. Advancing healthy active ageing: Initiatives promoting healthy and active ageing should be prioritized, fostering intergenerational solidarity and harnessing the potential of older generations to contribute meaningfully to society.

To sum up, these eleven points show the important things our societies need right now. They highlight how we urgently need to work together to solve these problems. I really hope that celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family will kickstart progress in these efforts.

Let's aim for a future where we're more united and families are doing better.
