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**Social development, including questions relating to the world social  
Situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family**

**Follow-up to the International Year of the Family**

**Report of the Secretary-General**

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## I. BACKGROUND

1. This report is the fourth biennial report on follow-up activities to the International Year of the Family. It is prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/124 of 17 December 1999 and Assembly decision 54/437 of 17 December 1999. The General Assembly resolution *requested* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council, on the appropriate ways and means to observe the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004.

### A. International Year of the Family (1994)

2. The United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 44/82 of 8 December 1989 proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family (IYF), with the aim of creating among Governments, policy-makers and the public a greater awareness of the family and of promoting activities in support of families. A major principle underlying the IYF proclamation was that the family constitutes the basic unit of society and therefore warrants special attention. Hence, the widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to families so that they may fully assume their responsibilities within the community.

3. The Year's observance resulted in a significant record of accomplishments at all levels. These included, *inter alia*, greater awareness of the role of families and family issues; advancing the subject-matter of families in the context of development; increased recognition of the importance of supporting families and of bringing about positive changes in the family realm; new initiatives and long-term activities in support of families all over the world, particularly at the local and national levels; strengthening and development of mechanisms devoted to family policy and research; the mobilization of a global network of partners, particularly non-governmental organizations; and the recognition that, despite the diversity of families, many key issues relating to families are common across countries and regions, and that international cooperation on family issues is valuable.

### B. Follow-up to the International Year of the Family, (1995-1999)

4. However, the Year left some crucial issues unresolved and some gaps in policies. In particular, it could not achieve a consensus on the definitions and terminology related to the family, family policies and family sensitive considerations. Partly because of this, the Year did not lead to the development of a long-term global plan of action on families, similar to the global programmes on the advancement of women, ageing, youth or disability.

5. In its resolution 52/81 of 12 December 1997, the General Assembly recognized that the basic objective of the follow-up of the IYF should be to strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions and to build upon their strengths, in particular at the national and local levels. A basic concern was the need to develop common understanding, to increase knowledge about family issues and to avoid stereotyping.

6. Achievements were also recorded during the follow-up phase. Many Governments formulated 'family sensitive' policies and improved national capacity for implementation. Attention was given to clarifying the concepts and terminology relating to the individual family member, family types and households. Family issues have been addressed repeatedly by United

Nations intergovernmental bodies. Families have been increasingly recognized as objects and agents of social policy in many countries. Mechanisms devoted to family policy and research have been developed or strengthened.

7. Furthermore, the major United Nations conferences, summits and meetings held since the IYF have addressed many issues and aspects related to the family and its role in social cohesion and integration. They provided guidance for strengthening family-centered components of policies and programmes, as part of an integrated comprehensive approach to development. They have thus recognized the importance of family issues in the international dialogue on development.

8. Since the International Year of the Family in 1994, follow-up activities have been integrated into the work programme of the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). DESA, accordingly, has adopted a multi-pronged approach with the following dimensions with a view to maintaining the momentum garnered during the year: (a) substantive servicing of inter-governmental bodies on issues related to families; (b) strengthening cooperation with concerned United Nations bodies and agencies; (c) initiating action-oriented research activities; (d) substantive support to technical cooperation activities in the field of families; and (e) strengthening cooperation with inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and research centres.

9. To strengthen the consultative process with non-governmental organizations, the Secretariat held two United Nations Consultative Meetings of NGOs on the Family on 9 February 1998 and 9 February 2000 respectively. The Consultative Meetings aimed at developing a joint long-term strategy and a common approach on family matters at the regional and global levels within the context of IYF follow-up.

10. Assistance continues to be provided through the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities to projects of direct benefit to families, particularly in developing and least-developed countries. The Secretariat continued the substantive management of the Fund by reviewing requests from Governments and non-governmental organizations for funding, (preparing funding recommendations) and monitoring and evaluating projects. The reserves and fund balances of the UN Trust Fund on Family Activities ending 31 December 1999 were \$484,944.<sup>1</sup>

## **II. THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY**

11. The Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family constitutes an important opportunity to give a new impetus to the follow-up of the Year. With resolution 54/124, the General Assembly reaffirmed the importance of the follow-up to the Year and of the observance of its tenth anniversary.

12. The objectives of the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family would be to:

- (a) Increase awareness of family issues among Governments as well as in the private sector;
- (b) Strengthen national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families;
- (c) Stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families;

- (d) Undertake at all levels reviews and assessments of the situation and needs of families, identifying specific issues and problems;
- (e) Enhance the effectiveness of local, national and regional efforts to carry out specific programmes concerning families, generate new activities and strengthen existing ones; and
- (f) Improve the collaboration among national and international non-governmental organizations in support of families.

13. The Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family could be launched in December 2003 at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly. The observance of the Tenth Anniversary during 2004 could also culminate in the holding of plenary sessions of the General Assembly on the topic of families. Results sought from the General Assembly plenary sessions in late 2004 would be devoted to: (a) an assessment of global trends that impact on families; (b) a review of progress achieved and obstacles encountered in the implementation of IYF objectives since 1994; (c) a reaffirmation of commitments made and the identification of further actions including to encourage the incorporation of effective family policies and programmes into national development strategies; as well as to encourage regional institutes to promote and undertake research and policy development on family issues.

14. Preparatory activities would start in 2001. At this point, it is envisioned that these preparations by the United Nations Secretariat will entail a wide range of activities, including one interregional meeting along with efforts to encourage action-oriented research and the development of frameworks on family policy development. The United Nations will strive to promote dialogue and consensus for furthering international cooperation on families. Greater efforts will be made to support the efforts of Governments in formulating family policies and programmes and in building their national capacities. Attention will be devoted to monitoring trends, identifying significant family related issues and analyzing their policy implications, with a view to helping the international community to respond to long term and emerging family related issues.

15. While activities for the Tenth Anniversary could be undertaken at all levels, the primary focus should be on activities at the national and local levels. The value of active participation of civil society should be recognized and utilized as a prerequisite for attaining the IYF objectives.

16. 2004 could be seen as a target year by which concrete progress should have been made to identify and elaborate issues of direct concern to families and to provide practical guidelines for national, regional and global actions as part of a sustained long-term effort to strengthen the economic and sustainable livelihood of families.

### **National Preparations of the Tenth Anniversary of the IYF**

17. Governments will be encouraged to set up a mechanism for the Tenth Anniversary of the IYF to stimulate, plan and coordinate activities by the appropriate governmental and non-governmental bodies and agencies. This mechanism would liaise with the United Nations regarding the programme for the Anniversary. Governments will also be invited to undertake, as part of their activities for 2004, sustained action at all levels concerning family issues, including studies and applied research, and concrete measures and approaches to promote the role of families in development and pursue national priorities related to family issues. Governments could furthermore be invited to prepare an agenda for national action for the Anniversary identifying specific family needs and proposing action programmes for implementation in 2004.

18. Governments will also be encouraged to consider developing family-impact assessments in their own development activities and to formulate, implement and evaluate family-sensitive policies and programmes in accordance with the objectives of the International Year of the Family. This could involve establishing or strengthening appropriate national mechanisms in respect of families.

19. National initiatives for the Anniversary would be adopted by each Government in light of its own situation and priorities and of the strategy for the International Year of the Family elaborated in General Assembly resolutions<sup>2</sup> on the International Year and further supplemented by major UN conferences, summits and meetings held since 1994.

### **International Preparations for the Tenth Anniversary of the IYF**

20. The Year 2004 should also be the occasion for a discussion by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission for Social Development and other bodies of Specialized Agencies of the global situation of families and of how the United Nations system might approach family issues as an integral part of development. The organization of the United Nations system should be encouraged to give wide support to the Tenth Anniversary, and specifically to those aspects of the Year that are of particular relevance to their programmes.

21. United Nations agencies and bodies, including the Regional Commissions, will be encouraged to develop plans for the celebration of the anniversary. Within the parameters of the mandates of United Nations organizations and agencies, regional and global cooperation will be promoted and strengthened to support national action. This will entail enhancing advisory services provided to Governments upon their request with a view to increasing their capacity related to family policies. The dissemination of information relating to the family and the sharing of experiences between countries should be facilitated. Furthermore, research activities on emerging and specific family issues should be carried out in cooperation with national, regional and international organizations and academic institutions. This would facilitate the exchange of information and stimulate international cooperation in the field of family research.

### **The Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

22. As the lead entity for the Tenth Anniversary of the IYF, the Department will stimulate and coordinate activities for the preparation for and observance of the Tenth Anniversary. To this end, activities will be undertaken on five main substantive themes: Approaches to family policy development; Technology and its impact on the family; Parental roles and intra-familial support systems; Statistics and indicators for family well-being; and HIV/AIDS and its impact on families.

23. The Department will support the work of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Council on the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family. Reports and results of expert group meetings will assist the intergovernmental bodies in monitoring the progress achieved in the preparations for the Tenth Anniversary and provide relevant analysis and information to support the debate on relevant family policy issues.

24. DESA will undertake a broad campaign to promote the observance of the Tenth Anniversary at all levels. This will include activities such as the promotion of the annual observance of the International Day of Families to *inter alia* encourage the active celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family at the national and local levels;

advocacy about the importance of family issues in social development planning, and awareness-raising on the pivotal role of families and on their specific needs.

25. DESA will undertake studies to increase the knowledge and information about relevant trends in the area of families. These studies will seek to enhance the capacity of governments for formulating, implementing and evaluating family-related policies and programmes. More specifically, the Secretariat will undertake a study on information and educational technology and its impact on families in selected countries. This will provide Governments with increased knowledge and enable them to make informed policy options as to how they will operate in the information age and assist in empowering families.

26. The United Nations recently completed two studies on family issues: “A Survey of Family Policies and Programmes of Eight Selected Countries”<sup>3</sup> and “Families and the World of Work: Four Case Studies”.<sup>4</sup> A database on family-policy has been created. The website of the Family Unit is periodically updated to facilitate access to information about the work of the United Nations in the arena of families. A directory of national mechanisms on the family will be prepared.

27. The United Nations will hold an Expert Meeting in 2002 in cooperation with concerned partners. The aim of the meeting will be to identify major regional trends affecting families and to exchange regional information on approaches for developing sustainable family policies. Moreover, governments are encouraged to host national and regional meetings.

28. To assist governments in addressing national priorities and emphasizing the family perspective in development planning, the United Nations will, through the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities, strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions, in particular at the national and local levels. This will be accomplished by promoting family-specific pilot activities and programmes and supporting policy development in least developed and developing countries, and countries with economies in transition.

### **III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

29. Major demographic, economic, cultural and social changes have affected both the family as an institution and family members as individuals. In that context, Governments have striven to undertake actions to support and strengthen the family as a basic unit of society in the performance of its central functions. This requires an increased understanding of the problems and the current and future role of the family as an institution in different socio-economic and cultural conditions. It also calls for a further examination of national experiences with family-related policies. The Tenth Anniversary of the IYF can be the occasion to reflect on these issues.

30. In this regard, the following recommendations are proposed for the consideration of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Development:

- (a) the Commission could review the proposals contained in this report on the preparations of the tenth anniversary of the IYF and recommend, through the Council and the Assembly, that the preparations of the Tenth Anniversary proceed along these lines;

- (b) The Commission for Social Development, during its thirty-ninth session in February 2001, may wish to review the preparations for the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family as part of its multi-year programme of work;
- (c) For effective policy in the area of the family, special attention needs to be directed to strengthening national capacities for policy analysis, formulating of options and evaluation. Political will and commitment, the provision of adequate resource, infrastructure and personnel are key factors impacting on the situation of families;
- (d) Within the context of preparations for and observance of the Tenth Anniversary, the resources of the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities need to be increased to assist Governments in formulating and implementing family-related policies and programmes;
- (e) Research and academic institutions should be actively involved in the Tenth Anniversary in the related policy research. Partnerships should be strengthened between the producers and users of family-related research; and
- (f) During the preparations for the Tenth Anniversary, the interaction between non-governmental organizations and families should be strengthened with a view to mobilizing public opinion, contributing to the dialogue on international families and developing a culture of partnership.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Unaudited Accounts for the Biennium ended 31 December 1999: Schedules of Individual Trust Funds, p.96.

<sup>2</sup> 44/82 of 8 December 1989, 46/92 of 16 December 1991, 47/237 of 20 September 1993, 50/142 of 21 December 1995, 52/81 of 12 December 1997, and 54/124 of 17 December 1999

<sup>3</sup> Ireland, Malaysia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, South Africa and Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>4</sup> Argentina, Egypt, India and the Netherlands.