



Empowering persons and society through the promotion of families

*Statement for the Commission of Social Development 2013:
why the achievement of development goals depends on how families are empowered*

*Speech by Mrs.
Cristina Napolitano
UN Delegate - New York
Family Enrichment NY*

Distinguished Delegates and Authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Marina and Ignacio, Dear Friends,

Last year, the Commission for Social Development decided that the priority theme for the 2013-2014 review and policy cycle should be 'Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all' (Report on the Fiftieth Session).

Following this mandate, the recent Expert Group Meeting held by the United Nations has provided the most authorized approach to a practical definition of empowerment relevant to achieving the three core objectives when it says that "Empowerment is the expansion of the capacity, volition, and vision necessary for people to become effective agents of human well-being."

From the experience and background of our Federation, this definition shows how important it is to consider the family as a main subject for empowerment. In dealing with families worldwide, we see the crucial importance of stable families as the environment in which most people learn the fundamental skills for life.

That is why we have made that link between families and the four dimensions in which empowerment can be found:

- Social empowerment as the "removal of social, political, legal and economic barriers to the active participation of certain social groups in society," and that is why we propose social recognition as the first level for family empowerment.
- Economic empowerment "enables marginalized people to assert greater control over their resources and life choices, especially including decisions on investments in health, housing and education," and that is why we consider different forms of economic help as a second level for family empowerment.

- Political empowerment is concerned “especially with state and social institutions that serve people’s needs, and entails an emphasis on constructing responsive government and cultivating citizen participation,” and that is why we value and encourage so much the effort that the United Nations and other international institutions are making for the voice of civil society to be heard –and, more specifically, families as the ‘basic building blocks’ of society.
- Last, legal empowerment refers to possibility of people to “demand and exercise their rights while at the same time strengthening institutions so that they can better respond to the needs of people.” In that sense, we feel that the consideration of family as subject of rights has to be studied in depth and developed consequently.

The economic and financial crisis makes this empowerment, if anything, more urgent. As mentioned by the 2011 Report of the Secretary-General on the Preparations for and Observance of the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014: “The continuing negative consequences of the economic and social crisis pose numerous challenges for families”.

At the same time, the financial crisis has another important consequence, also mentioned by the Report. “In times of increased vulnerability and uncertainty, the importance of families’ economic and social functions becomes more visible. The ability of families to fulfill those functions, however, is put into question as families find it increasingly more difficult to care for household members young and old, reconcile work and family life and maintain the intergenerational bonds that sustained them in the past.”

Moreover, in our statement for CSW we will also stress the importance of considering the empowerment of women as part of family empowering. In this sense, empowering women who are mothers is particularly important because they have a strong influence in their families and in their communities as agents of peace. A 2011 study by the OECD entitled Doing Better for Families shows that mothers who have access to flexible work are most likely to have the number of children they want. In this sense, policies that empower a woman as a mother will directly empower families and increase their well-being.

Empowering women who work is important because a greater presence of women in society will help to manifest the contradictions present when society is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity. Women should also receive equal pay for equal work and protection for working mothers should be provided. Policies should focus on conciliation and balance between family and work life, recognizing the family and highlighting its role and the value of having a successful family life.

We really hope that all this effort can find a response in United Nations agencies and bodies, regional commissions, civil society organizations and academic institutions. That is why we are here today, and let me thank all of you again for it.