SPECIAL REPORT

United Nations International Day of Families
May 13, 2010

Celebrations in more than 40 nations

The Impact of Migration on Families Around the World
This year’s commemoration of the International Day of Families focuses on the impact of migration on families around the world.

Rising social and economic disparities create both pressures and incentives for people to leave their homes in search of better opportunities. Many migrate out of necessity due to poverty, unemployment, political or armed conflicts or violations of human rights.

Parents migrate to improve the well-being of their children and other extended family members. In host countries, men and women can earn a better living and send income to family members back home. Migrants contribute to the economy of the host country, while also enriching the social and cultural fabric. Women migrant workers can gain independence and autonomy, becoming positive role models for others.

Despite its many benefits, migration also places heavy burdens on family members. Migrants can face harsh living conditions, discrimination and low wages. They often lack safety nets, and suffer disproportionately in times of economic hardship. Unemployment can push many to the bottom rung of societies. Children of migrants can face a number of emotional and economic challenges unique to their circumstances, in particular a greater vulnerability to human trafficking, child labour and violence.

To make the most of the benefits of migration, governments should implement policies that help migrants adapt and prosper in their host countries. I call on those states that have not yet done so to ratify and implement the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. On this International Day of Families, let us renew our commitment to efforts that help and support migrant families around the world.
NEW YORK, NY, USA - The Universal Peace Federation held its annual symposium to mark the United Nations International Day of Families May 17th at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The event was sponsored by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Guinea with co-sponsorship from the Permanent Missions of Kazakhstan, Nepal, Nigeria, Qatar, Sri Lanka, and Sudan.

The symposium examined this year’s theme, the “Impact of Migration on Families Around the World” with special attention to the stresses and strains on family traditions, marriage and child-rearing. “Strong, healthy families are vital to the success of so many of the UN’s larger goals, including the Millennium Development Goals,” said Lynn Walsh, director of UPF’s Marriage, Family and Peace Initiative.

The message of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was read by UPF Secretary General Taj Hamad, and representatives from the sponsoring Permanent Missions offered remarks. Among the speakers were H.E. Mr. Alpha Ibrahima Sow, Permanent Mission of Guinea; H.E. Miss Alya Ahmed S. Al-Thani, Permanent Mission of Qatar; and H.E. Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Permanent Mission of Nepal. Particular focus was placed on the challenges that families divided by the migration of one or both parents face in bringing up their children to respect traditional cultures and norms.

Other featured speakers included Ms. Sharon Slater, President of Family Watch International, who urged the United Nations to cease promoting anti-family educational policies that end up inhibiting the fulfillment of larger UN objectives. Dr. Frederick Swarts of the World Association of NGOs introduced a new “Code of ethics for the family” being launched by WANGO. Ms. Muriel Glasgow of MG Associates and Ms. Renate Kaczmarska, Acting Focal Point for the United Nations Programme on the Family, spoke about how technology and social networking can be used to bring divided migrant families closer together. Finally, interactive group sessions allowed all the 50 participants to share ideas and make their voices heard.
AFRICA

DOUALA, CAMEROON
Speakers at a symposium accented the various causes of migration and gave relevant examples of each. People were challenged to be more conscious and concerned about the issue of migration. The noble role of the family was explained, with an emphasis on the family’s responsibility toward the community, society, nation, and world.

Participants included religious leaders, professors, journalists, and business people. “Love is the key to stabilizing a family,” a religious leader stated, “and a stable family leads to a stable society, nation, and world.”

AGBOVILLE, COTE D’IVOIRE
Couples who have been married for more than 25 years were called forward to receive family awards. Six couples were selected from among the many notable families in Agboville for this distinction. Recipients were joyfully surprised by their award and very grateful. Three of the honored couples were Ivorians, and there was one couple each from Burkina Faso, Benin, and Nigeria.

An elderly man from Burkina Faso was touched that he and his wife, who have been married for 45 years, were chosen for this honor. “It’s very good that this organization didn’t distinguish between nationalities,” he said. “I will promote your vision in the Burkina community here in Agboville. This emphasis on the family can do much for peace in this city, where political leaders are all in conflict.”

LAGOS, NIGERIA
A former president, a traditional leader, and a university administrator contributed their wisdom and experience to discussions on the impact of migration on families. They emphasized the family as an indispensable model for good governance, good leadership, and peace. The head of an NGO working with African refugees talked about the challenges Nigerian families face when they move from one state to another.

People who have made outstanding achievements in their field of endeavors and can serve as role models to youth made a public recommitment of their marriage. The program emphasized the flow of mentorship within the family from grandparents to parents to youth.

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE
The country director of the UN Population Fund and a representative of the president spoke about ways to protect families. A statement from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children’s Affairs called upon organizations to “support families in the execution of their duties and responsibilities as part of their community and national development initiatives.”

The gathering focused on families as fundamental units of humanity, and speakers called on governments, organizations, and individuals to be more aware of the troubles, strengths, and needs of families.

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA
Former President of Zambia, the Rt. Hon. Gen. Malimba N. Masheke, addressed a symposium on migration. “Most families have migrated around the world because of wars, social reasons, or economic factors,” he said. “Each individual needs to learn about the impact of migration on families; it’s not only on the shoulders of the UN or the government.” Two breakout groups met to develop plans to counsel families and promote good family values.
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA
Nine couples who have been married for more than 25 years were honored with awards. Some international and intercultural couples talked about the challenges in their marriage, sharing humorous anecdotes about the joys and benefits of living together and transcending difficulties. With the upcoming celebration of Argentina’s bicentennial on everyone’s mind, one speaker called for “reviving the universal values embodied by our patriots at the very beginning of our national independence.” This time for reflection was described as an opportunity to “overcome mistakes” and make a collective effort “to realize the dreams of our Founding Fathers of one brotherhood, one big human family living in peace.”

BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS
A Christian minister discussed the topic of migration. He said that parents do not decide to migrate without thinking about the many possible consequences. “Migrant children are at high risk of falling victim to child trafficking, child labor, conflict with the law, and violence,” he said. “Around the world, the family has been and will always be considered to be of greatest importance.” A representative of CARICOM, the Caribbean community, told the gathering, “In the family, we gain many experiences, since the family is the school of love. We need strong, committed families who are dedicated to be role models for everyone.”

QUITO, ECUADOR
High school students whose family members migrated to another country described their experiences and offered reflections on the impact of migration from various perspectives. They noted that some people rise to the challenges more easily than others. The speakers recommended making good choices, not letting family members down, and seeking peace and love in daily activities.

One educator noted that it is important to place high value on families being together. When people need more money to sustain life and migrate in order to improve their incomes, families may be divided. One young speaker commented, “I would rather be poor and have no money than be alone.”

GEORGETOWN, GUYANA
Prayers of blessing for families were offered by Hindu, Muslim, and Christian leaders. One person spoke about the impact of broken families on children. Seven outstanding couples were awarded certificates. One couple had traveled from afar, crossing two large rivers to be present for the occasion. The husband was inspired to receive this recognition and expressed interest in holding a similar event in his village.

CASTRIES, ST. LUCIA
UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message on the Day of Families was broadcast on television news with added commentary: “The family is the place where the future citizens of the nation are raised. Whether the nation produces emotionally-balanced citizens or emotionally crippled citizens has a lot to do with the way they are raised in their families.” Listeners were urged to mark the day by making a special effort throughout this week to love their family, their children, and their relatives, and show appreciation to their neighbors and communities.

MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY
An event in the national parliament focused on the importance of the family as the school of love and foundation of peace. “The most important thing for us as human beings is to establish a family of unconditional love, a family in which one feels secure and supported,” a university rector stated. “The family is the principal cell of the whole, peaceful and prosperous society.”

A mother of six children and grandmother of 12 recommended dialogue and capacity-building to overcome difficulties as beneficial ways of building marriage relationships and the bond between parents and children. She said that children learn by observing their parents. Certificates of recognition were given to couples who had been married for 40 years or longer.

CARACAS, VENEZUELA
A seminar on leadership emphasized the family as the school of universal values and good character for future leaders who can shape a world of peace. Couples who had been married more than 20 years were awarded a Medal of Peace in recognition of their investment of effort and love which bore fruit in loving children and good citizens. In the award ceremony, children presented the medal to their mother, and she presented it to her husband. Listening to the couples’ stories from daily life was a valuable opportunity to learn from the experiences of others.
KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

After a week of discussions and preparations, Afghan and international youth raised funds and collected clothing to aid some of the many people in Kabul who desperately need help.

On May 14, these kind-hearted and bright-minded youths gathered in the UPF office in Kabul. After a brief discussion about the International Day of Families, they headed towards the Tang-e Logar, a place not far from the city center. After distributing aid packages consisting of food and garments, they shared their thoughts and feelings with the families who have been living in tents. The rice, oil, tea, soap, candy, and used clothing they distributed helped more than 100 displaced people in the tent camp.

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

The UN Information Centre officer-in-charge, Mr. Kazi Ali Reza, told a symposium that families are primary providers of emotional support as well as material support. He pointed out that around 218 million people have migrated to other countries in search of employment, and 780 million people have migrated within their own countries. Separation can have high emotional cost both for those who move and for those left behind.

TOKYO, JAPAN

In Tokyo, where an estimated one in ten couples is international, ten international couples and their children were special guests at a Day of Families gathering. With more than two million foreign residents in their country, the Japanese are experiencing first-hand the impact of migration. Four international couples, with spouses from Benin, Korea, Venezuela, and Ghana, talked about their family experiences.

The wife of the Ambassador from Benin joined the African men in performing traditional African dances. “Family is the base of society,” she said. “If we value and support international families, the world will be at peace.”

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GANGTOK, INDIA

A government commissioner told a conference that mushrooming family, social, and international problems are the result of the loss of traditional family values and the modern lifestyle. Other speakers challenged the audience to become embodiments of peace as the basis of family peace.

The highlights of the celebration was the selection of the Sikkim State “Ideal Family-2010” from five nominees. The principal of a college and his wife won this year’s title.

In the Punjab, 200 students at a computer sciences institute took part in a Day of Families program.

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TAIPEI, TAIWAN

A family outing to the countryside helped promote good family relationships and bring people closer to the natural environment.

Parents and children were invited to immerse themselves in a travel adventure and experience a natural, healthy, and happy time together. There were opportunities to walk in the grass, drink fresh cow’s milk, enjoy a butterfly garden, and stroll along an ecological pathway.

CHACHEONGSAO, THAILAND

Participants in an international service project and students planted trees at a school. Scholarships were awarded to ten students from poor families to enable them to continue their education.

Families listened to a presentation on the “Family as the School of Love” and participated in a variety of family games. A grandfather and grandmother charmed everyone with traditional Thai dances, accompanied by two daughters and a granddaughter.
TBILISI, GEORGIA
A roundtable discussion on the “Role of the Family in the Peacemaking Process” took place in the Abkhazian parliament. A service project at an orphanage in Tbilisi helped create a family-like atmosphere there.

RIGA, LATVIA
At an institute in Riga, scholars discussed the model of a three-generation family, the influence of the family on the lives of students, and changes in Latvian families over the past 20 years.

At another event, which drew participants from Estonia and Russia, the present situation of families in Latvia and Estonia was reviewed. Speakers analyzed the causes of family breakdown and proposed various ways to strengthen marriage and family.

CHISINAU, MOLDOVA
A conference focused on the most effective strategies for protecting the family and marriage. Professors and staff from the Ministry of Family Protection and the Ministry of Youth and Sports offered relevant information and encouraged cooperative relationships among scholars, professors, psychologists, volunteers, students, and NGO leaders.

MOSCOW, RUSSIA
Schoolchildren and their parents took part in various sports competitions: relay races, table tennis, darts, checkers, and soccer. The event that captured the most interest was a football tournament under the motto of “Play Football for Peace.”

Students from nine Moscow universities participated in a Mr. and Miss University Contest that brought together youth from different nationalities and cultures. Participants organized charity projects and joined in discussions on the role of youth in creating a culture of peace. They spoke about their dreams, values, and life goals, demonstrated their talents, and answered questions. Most expressed gratitude to their parents and said that they dream of building a good and strong family in the future.

In St. Petersburg, students role-played a State Duma meeting with factions representing businesses, youth, families, and the Red Cross. Each faction was given a draft legislation on family and marriage to study and propose changes and amendments.

In other parts of Russia, special activities were planned to stimulate people to think more deeply about families. At a “Best Dad” contest at a rehabilitation center in Yekaterinburg, three generations of men worked together to present their family history to others and cook their family’s favorite food. In Nizhni Novgorod and Rostov-on-Don, opinion polls were taken about families and Russia’s increasingly multicultural society. Classroom presentations on the Day of Families took place in Ufa, Reva, and Serov. In Novosibirsk, college students visited an orphanage and organized games for the children.

KIEV, UKRAINE
Scholars, government officials, and NGO leaders gave presentations on ethical principles of a healthy society, family values in various cultures, and strategies for creating a family-friendly society. A round-table discussion followed on moral education for young people and reviving family values.
EUROPE

VIENNA, AUSTRIA
A conference on the impact of migration featured expert speakers as well as couples with intercultural marriages, followed by round-table discussions. A Filipino Christian woman married to a Muslim journalist from Egypt talked about how her relationship with God gave her the inner resources to deal with cultural and religious differences. A Chinese musician living in Vienna talked about the challenges of building a marriage with the German man she met during their student days.

ZAGREB, CROATIA
The European House was the site of discussions on the ways the financial crisis is affecting families, addressing inequalities in family roles, and how to increase family unity and solidarity in times of hardship.

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC
An economist described demographic trends in Czech families and the growing tendency to consider a family a loose community of two people. According to the director of the Children in Danger foundation, there are difficulties finding government funds to help children in problem families, and officials have different concepts about how to address the problems. The private sector provides almost half of their current budget to help families. Parents in the audience expressed interest in learning more about how to protect their children from immoral trends in advertising and the media that undermine family stability.

HELSINKI, FINLAND
At a conference in the Finnish Parliament, Roman Catholic and Lutheran speakers gave their church’s perspective on the family. A Muslim leader described typical challenges that Muslim students face in Finnish schools, and an educator gave statistics on intercultural marriages and families.

PARIS, FRANCE
The head of an organization dealing with migration issues talked about how migration affects families in Europe. A marriage and family counselor spoke about her experiences helping intercultural couples deal with issues in their marriage.

STUTTGART, GERMANY
The focus of discussion was on how international couples can act as bridges between cultures. Recognition was given to outstanding couples who are working to bridge differences, helping refugees adapt to life in Germany, and building understanding between people of South America and Germany.

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY
Parents and children spent a day volunteering at a temporary residence for families who had to leave their homes due to financial problems. Walls were painted in cheerful designs and children enjoyed a variety of fun activities. One of the main organizers brought her one-month-old baby with her for the day. On the following day, there was a conference on the role of families in protecting their members in both extreme and normal circumstances. True Family Awards were given to five outstanding couples.

REYKJAVIK, ICELAND
About 200 people from different cultures joined in a parade through the city. They demonstrated how migration has transformed this isolated island populated by mostly northern Europeans into a colorful and exciting multicultural society. Exhibits at the town hall showed the activities of the various ethnic groups, calling attention to the contributions that people from other national origins bring to the nation. The aim was to inspire people about the fruits of diversity.
EUROPE (CONTINUED)

PICTURES: (Top left) Finland-MP Rev. Lauri Oinonen talks about Christian views of the family. (Top center) Ireland-Grzegorz Jagielski from the Embassy of Poland addresses a symposium on migration. (Top right) Norway-Best-selling author Mrs. Haone Nabintu Herland talks about developments in families and societies. (Middle left) France-Chansamone Voravong discusses the impact of migration on families. (Middle right) Hungary-Families working together on a mural at a temporary shelter for families. (Bottom left) Iceland-An international parade in Reykjavik. (Bottom right) Germany-Recipients of family awards.

DUBLIN, IRELAND
At a symposium at the Lantern Interfaith Centre, speakers shared from various perspectives about how migration has impacted their life or how they are dealing with some of the challenges it is bringing to Irish society. Issues raised included: integration into Irish society; dealing with racial and religious stereotyping; children’s education; and the economic recession. Staff from the Embassies of Poland and the Philippines addressed the symposium. Many immigrants from those countries are Catholics, like the majority of the Irish, so they share a common faith with people in their new homeland. Other speakers addressed the experiences of Muslim and Sikh immigrants to Ireland.

THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS
Prominent speakers talked about international and intra-national migration, citing their own experiences with diverse cultures. Some speakers had roots in Indonesia or Suriname, and they talked about how they are working to improve relations between their country of birth and their new homeland. Spiritual perspectives on the family from Christian and Muslim traditions were offered as resources. In a creative demonstration of the potential harmonization of cultures, a pianist played a medley of several national anthems. A choir from Suriname, themselves one-time immigrants, delighted the audience.

OSLO, NORWAY
After a representative from the UN communications office described the UN’s work in support of families, a researcher presented statistics about changing family trends in Norway.

MADRID, SPAIN
“The family is like a garden created to be planted and to cultivate human life with love,” a Catholic priest told an audience that included people from as far away as Peru and Afghanistan. A scholar talked about the core value of respect in the family and clan in oriental society. Volunteers visited a home for the elderly and put on a program that included songs and folk dances, gifts of flowers, and a birthday party.

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM
A symposium examined the human experience of migration, including the tensions that develop as differences emerge between the first-generation migrants and their children and grandchildren. To counterbalance an image of “fortress Europe,” migration was explained as a natural process where far-away neighbors come to visit one another, and some of them stay on for a variety of reasons, including seeking employment or further education. At a seminar in Milton Keynes, migration was described as a potential gift, promoting openness to other cultures and the enrichment of learning other languages. However, it can also be destabilizing, especially for adolescents. Some youth grow up feeling the dilemma of being neither integrated in their new home nor accepted in their country of origin if they return.
OTHER NATIONS

OTTAWA, CANADA
Migrants to Canada from Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean described their new life in Canada as a process of adapting, settling, and integrating. In recent decades Canada has welcomed many migrants, believing that they have something to contribute to their society. Tensions arise between the values of the parents who migrated and their children who are growing up in a new country. Having left their extended family behind, people form a new extended family where they settle. “We enrich the country with what we bring,” one speaker said; “we also need to adopt the good aspects of the culture here.”

HONIARA, SOLOMON ISLANDS
Leaders from the government, churches, and NGOs participated in a symposium featuring Mr. Greg Mills from the International Organization for Migration. Based on his past experiences working for Australian immigration in Asia and his recent experiences working with the IOM in the Solomon Islands, he gave comprehensive explanations about the situation of migrants, including serious issues of human trafficking and lengthy separation of families. His presentation gave new insights into the impact of migration in the region.

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL
Ambassadors for Peace along with their families gathered at the beautiful Bell Gardens in Jerusalem for a discussion about how families can contribute to peacebuilding. They shared a picnic and games for the youth. Among the participants was a former city councilor, two ministerial advisers, and several professors and educators. The Bell Gardens was chosen as the location for the event since it offered the possibility for both Jews and Muslims, who normally cannot easily come to the same location, to come together in the spirit of one family under God.

UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES
DECLARATION

NEW YORK, 13 MAY 2010 —
On the occasion of the International Day of Families, the Universal Peace Federation honors UN resolution 52/81 of 12 December 1997, in which the United Nations General Assembly recognizes the need to strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions. UPF offers the following recommendations:

First, Universal Peace Federation acknowledges that the family is a microcosm of the global community. If the world is to finally come to an era of sustainable peace and harmony among civilizations, that peace must be founded on this basic, most essential social unit of humankind. In other words, the family is the central building block of society, as well as being an instrument for peace and reconciliation.

Second, the family is universal. Regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliations, we are all members of families. Most importantly, the family is the school of love and ethics. Through experiences in our families, we learn to embrace and value all relationships in our wider human family; with friends, neighbors, co-workers, colleagues and strangers.

Third, marriage and family are the basis of human development and the core institutions for education in character, ethics, social relationships, and citizenship. Strong, healthy, loving families help protect society from the moral decline of its youth, increase in crime, drug abuse and corruption, as well as the spread of diseases, such as AIDS. In addition, it can help break down the age-old resentments that have fueled religious, tribal and civil conflict.

Fourth, throughout history, the family has successfully adapted to change. It has survived revolutions, outlived empires, and endured through the economic and social unrest of many societies. This adaptability, however, is now being threatened by a wide range of social developments, economic, cultural, and political. Now is the time to strengthen the family. Restoring the family is one way we can address the proliferation of social and civil problems plaguing the world today.

Fifth, lasting peace is secured not merely through laws, backed by the power of government enforcement, but by a rising awareness of our universal solidarity as one human family, brothers and sisters who share a common spiritual and moral heritage. We are one family under God.

Universal Peace Federation thereby resolves to join the United Nations to declare May 13th as The International Day of Families.
You fill me with joy and admiration for your care and attention to the issues surrounding the family. The international community can come together to address climate change, the financial crisis, and the food and energy shortages. But the paramount responsibility, without which life has no meaning, is the preservation of the family.

H.E. Mr. Abdalmahmood A. Mohamad
Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sudan to the UN

The International Day of Families provides the right opportunity to promote awareness of migration as a critical issue affecting families, especially at this time of global financial, economic and climate change crises.

H.E. Alpha Ibrahima Sow
Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Guinea to the United Nations

A 2008 study revealed that the breakdown of the family costs American taxpayers a staggering $112 billion every year! Governments make vast expenditures to address family breakdown associated with divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing and for anti-poverty, criminal justice, and education programs serving children and adults from broken families.

Sharon Slater
President, Family Watch International