

Statement Given by Sharon Slater at the Opening Ceremony of the UN Art Exhibit  
"Uniting Nations for a Family-Friendly World,"  
May 17, 2016

Today I have the honor of speaking as a representative of civil society on this momentous occasion.

This is an appropriate continuation of the celebration of the International Day of Families in conjunction with the High Level Meeting on the Family held yesterday.

Truly, this ceremony and the events of yesterday together are uniting nations for a more family-friendly world.

As the President of Family Watch International, a cosponsor of yesterday's events, and this exhibit, and in my capacity as chair of the UN Family Rights Caucus representing the voices of over five million people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and faiths, from over 170 countries, I would like to commend the coalition of UN Member States and the Group of Friends of the Family for their leadership, vision and courage in bringing the protection and promotion of the family to the forefront of the UN's agenda.

We wish to fully support the government statement in support of the family presented yesterday by Belarus. We believe this is just one step-- an important foundation upon which to build our efforts to promote and protect the vital role of family in society and to foster its key role in sustainable development moving forward. We join in solidarity with the Group of Friends of the Family. We, as civil society, stand by to assist Member States and the UN system in identifying challenges to the family and ways to address them.

I would also like to draw your attention to the three declarations presented yesterday--one by government, one by civil society, and a third representing the voices of children from all around the world. Each statement echoes timeless principles grounded in international law and nature's law itself. But I would like to particularly focus on the Children's Declaration. Because in the end, this is what the family is all about--the nurturing and preparing of children to become positive contributors of society.

Each Child Has the Right to Life

Each Child Has the Right to a Family

Each Child Has the Right to a Married Mother and Father

Each Child Has the Right to the Protection and Guidance of Their Parents

Each Child Has the Right to Education

Each Child Has the Right to a Religion

Each Child Has the Right to Innocence and Childhood

The Protection of Children Requires the Protection of the Family

To conclude, I would like to recite the lyrics to a song written especially for the celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the International Year of the Family held in Doha at the time of the issuance of the historic Doha Declaration on the Family. Written by a good friend of mine, Joy Saunders Lundberg, and musician Janice Kapp Perry, these lyrics are simple but profound and appropriate for this occasion:

The family is the beating heart that keeps a nation strong.

If families fail then nations fall, and all that's good is gone.

The time has come, the time is now for everyone to see

That if we are to save the world, we must save the family!

Fathers, rise up and take your place,

Be strong and kind and true.

Keep your family free from harm, as loving fathers do.

Mothers rise up and take your place to nurture and renew.

The hopes and dreams within every child, as loving mothers do.

Fathers, mothers, lead and guide,

Always walking side by side,

Keeping family first in life,

Staying strong as husband and wife.

Thank you!