

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 57th SESSION

### Panel discussion on the implementation of States' obligations on the role of the family in supporting the human rights of its members

25 September 2024

**Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**, opened the panel discussion by saying that International human rights law has long recognized that the family is society's natural and fundamental unit. The valuable functions the family performs for its members and the community as a whole are undeniable.

She stressed that All families should be spaces where all family members enjoy their human rights. In all families, all individuals must be free from discrimination and violence. In all families, women's right to equality and the rights and the best interests of the child must be guaranteed. This concretely means that **everyone of full age has a right to start a family, based on their own free will; every member of the family, women, children, people with disabilities, older people, and LGBTIQ+ individuals, can fully enjoy their human rights at home, without discrimination; and in particular, women's right to equality** be fully respected. Women must have equal rights in all matters relating to marriage and family relations, child-rearing, property, and inheritance in the family. Unfortunately, according to a [World Bank report](#), 85 countries across all regions still have discriminatory legal provisions against women related to marriage and divorce, and the existing gender gaps in property and inheritance laws persist.

Children should have their voices heard consistent with their evolving capacities. People with disabilities should be supported to have control over their lives and to be included in society. Older persons' agency and dignity must be upheld within the family. Women should have an equal say in decision-making in the family.

She concluded by saying that the family space must be a safe space, free of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. **States have an obligation to make this a reality**, by preventing violence, abuse and exploitation in family contexts and by ensuring adequate protection measures for victims and survivors; by eliminating laws that tolerate discrimination or violence in the family; by supporting families to live decent lives, including by providing social protection, quality public services and decent work; and by facilitating family reunifications of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, and preventing separation of family members against their will.

**H.E. Maya Morsy, Minister of Social Solidarity of Egypt**, affirmed that the Country was part of the core group to initiate resolution 54/17 in October 2023, which includes holding this event, celebrating 30 years on the international year of the Family.

She further provided a list of Egyptian provisions, laws, and measures drafted around human and family development. In particular, legislation has three mega developmental programs: The decent Life Program upgrading the local infrastructure of housing; Family Development Program upgrading demographics & standard of living; and the Bedaya National Initiative focusing on human development.

In conclusion, she affirmed that recognizing the cultural specificities of countries is paramount in the formulation and implementation of our global family development policies. A one-size-fits-all approach to family development can be counterproductive, leading to unintended consequences or resistance. By acknowledging and respecting specificities, the international community can foster policies that promote the well-being of families.

**H.E. Mariam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad, Minister of Social Development and Family of Qatar** on this thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, emphasized that the family is the cornerstone of building stable and prosperous societies and that the task now has become to protect families from the factors of their disintegration that surround them from all sides.

She recalled the joint pledge entitled "Human Rights 75: The Family Pledge" that supports and protects the family and takes appropriate measures under the relevant provisions of international human rights law regarding supporting, protecting, and empowering the family. The **State of Qatar** has been at the forefront of countries that have taken responsibility for enhancing family stability and protecting it from threats, whether resulting from conflicts, the effects of modern technology, social and economic transformations, or intellectual threats that undermine the family system and the complementarity of roles between men and women.

In the Qatar National Vision 2023, the family is not just an entity that must be protected, but rather the first unit for the emergence of noble morals on which civilizations are built and according to which nations rise.

### Panelists

**Ms. Haina Lu, a Member of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls**, as the first panelist of the discussion, reported that International human rights law recognizes the fundamental role of the family in protecting human rights and the obligation of States to ensure the rights of all members are respected within the family. The right to family life includes "the right to marry and found a family," as well as the "right not to be subject to arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence." Women have long played an important role in the family.

States have an important role in ensuring the family is a source of rights' protection and equality among its members, especially for women and girls.

In 2015, the Working Group published a report addressing issues relating to women in cultural and family life. This report supports diverse forms and compositions of families. At the same time, it advocated for the elimination of discrimination within the family, such as economic or legal. It also calls for a ban of child or forced marriage, temporary marriage, and polygamy. In 2017, in another Working Group report, the central role of women as agents of cultural change was highlighted. Women's right to equality in autonomy and self-determination is crucial in this regard. It is essential to actively challenge, scrutinize, and eliminate legal and social norms that subject women to male dominance.

**Mr. Umberto Cattaneo, Public Finance Economist in the Universal Social Protection Department at the International Labour Organization**, focused on social security or social protection systems. These enable families to successfully navigate lifecycle risks and multiple transformations, including climate and health crises. They do this by guaranteeing access to healthcare and income security, thereby enabling families to adapt to change in a way that protects their rights and dignity.

He reported data on how many people have access to social security: globally, in 2023 only 52 percent of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit, increasing from 43 percent in 2015. However, **families around the world experience varying access to social protection depending on their country of residence. In high-income countries, they enjoy closer to universal coverage. While social protection effective coverage goes down to 71 percent in upper-middle-income**

**countries and 32 percent in lower-middle-income countries. At the same time, social protection effective coverage in low-income countries remains unacceptably low at 9.7 percent.**

Regular domestic financing is the main strategy to close the financing gap, considering that building both health and social protection systems, including floors, implies long-term commitments. At the national level, this involves ensuring a broad tax base with adequate taxation levels and social security contributions paid by employers and workers, which in turn supports the formalization of the workforce. Fair taxation to close this financing gap and to ensure the human right to social security and healthcare to all families.

Moreover, reallocating some public expenditures to social protection and health is of utmost importance to expand domestic financing. As well as, the effective management of sovereign debt, can unlock additional resources to allocate to social protection and healthcare spending.

He concluded by saying that social protection and healthcare are human rights and their fulfillment requires the definition of a comprehensive vision for their financing.

**Ms. Roqayah Ajaj, Entrepreneur and Disability Rights Advocate**, shared her personal experiences and story as a blind student in Saudi Arabia. She reported that the support of her family and the opportunities provided by my government enabled me to pursue higher education in an inclusive environment. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 announced a renewed commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities. The plan emphasizes equal opportunities and accessibility, and faithful implementation of the policies will ensure that people like me are not left behind.

Moreover, the new anti-discrimination laws protected the rights of persons with disabilities and ensured accessibility to equal opportunities in all areas of life—education, employment, healthcare, and public services.

In conclusion, she reiterated the critical role that States play in safeguarding the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The responsibility falls on States to create environments where every individual, regardless of their ability, can thrive. States must adopt and enforce policies that protect the rights of persons with disabilities, eliminate discrimination, and ensure equal access to education, employment, and public services. They must also invest in accessibility, awareness campaigns, and family support networks to ease the burden on families. In doing so, they can empower not only persons with disabilities but their families, creating a future where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

**Mr. Sami Jaber, International Policy Officer at 5Rights Foundation**, focused on the key role of families in supporting children's development in the digital age, as families struggle to navigate the challenges of a digital landscape that often puts their children at risk. While families play a vital role in guiding and protecting children, the scale and complexity of online harms make it impossible for them to succeed in this task on their own. Children are exposed to harmful content such as self-harm, extreme body ideals and violent pornography. They also report being 'addicted', 'distracted', having 'no control' and feeling 'panicked' as a consequence.

Tech companies often try to shift the blame away from themselves, towards children and parents. This can lead to family conflicts, more restrictive control measures that limit children's autonomy and ultimately create a damaging cycle where children feel more isolated and misunderstood. Putting responsibility on parents shifts the blame and allows tech to remain unaccountable for harmful design as it creates a false sense of security because the tools do not actually prevent most harms stemming from online platforms

By taking the responsibility to build digital environments that are safe by design and where children's rights are implemented by design and default, States and tech companies can alleviate the overwhelming pressures on families and children, allowing children to focus on growing up and parents to guide and empower them, rather than policing them.

**Children have established rights that exist online under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its accompanying General comment No. 25.** It firmly shifts the focus from putting the burden on children and parents to instead holding States and tech companies accountable for creating a digital environment that upholds children's rights. It also emphasizes clear obligations for States and companies to ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security to children by design and default, child rights impact assessments, independent monitoring, oversight and accountability, and child-friendly remedy and redress.

Families are the first and most enduring protectors of children, but they cannot fulfill this function effectively without systemic support. Families cannot shoulder this responsibility alone. When platforms are designed without the best interests of children in mind, it is unjust and ineffective to place the responsibility on families to navigate a fundamentally flawed system.

### Interactive dialogue

25 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries, acknowledging the important function of families in the societies,** stressed states' obligations to protect all families and all individuals within them in all the diversity fully reflective of established human rights standards in relation to the human rights of women, gender equality and the rights of the child. As affirmed by the **UAE**, the family is the pillar of all societies. **Luxembourg** added that women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals are entitled to their full human rights and safety and security within their family free from violence, abuse, or coercion.

**Canada and Paraguay** recognized the integral role families can play in the enjoyment of the human rights of their members. Family-friendly policies should take a human rights-based approach, advance gender equality and prevent discrimination. A family-friendly policy ensures universal access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights, ending child early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, addressing women's and girls' disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, encouraging women's equitable participation in the labor force including through paid maternity and parental leave, supporting families to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and ending all forms of family domestic and sexual violence and other harmful practices.

**Austria** underlined the importance of access to quality education for all children to equip them with the skills to protect themselves and to understand and protect the rights of others. **The EU's** child guarantee addresses gender equality by ensuring access to affordable childcare allowing both parents notably women to remain active in the workforce and maintain economic autonomy and higher pension contributions.

**UNICEF** reaffirmed the recognition of children as individual, full and independent rights holders within the family and recall that the protection of the family in international law is indissolubly linked to the principle of equality including gender equality and to the protection of its individual members against all kinds of discrimination, violence or abuse within the family setting. **UNFPA** supported families and the rights of family members by assisting governments in expanding gender-responsive family policies

and promoting gender equality and a more equal distribution of unpaid care work and engaging communities and all family members to challenge negative social and gender norms to prevent human rights violations such as gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, and child marriage.

**The UN Women** considered families as a home for equality and justice, free from stereotypes, gender roles, gender-based discrimination, harmful social norms, and unequal gendered power relations, however, it can also be a space for intimate partner violence, domestic violence, marital rape, child sexual abuse, honor killings, female genital mutilation and child and early forced marriage. These forms of violence can result in femicide, the most extreme and brutal manifestation of violence against women and girls.

**NGOs** affirmed that a safe loving family environment where individuals' human rights are respected is more important than the composition of that family. However, for many, family is where human rights violations are normalized and stereotypes, discrimination, and abuses are perpetuated through intimate partner violence, child and elder abuse, reproductive coercion, sexual violence and the denial of access to critical services and/or economic resources. The majority of violence that women, children, older people, and people with disabilities face worldwide is from members of their own family including the women and girls killed in the name of family honor. Indeed, as affirmed by **Hope and Homes for Children**, the protection of the family is inherently linked to the principle of equality and non-discrimination, including gender equality, and to safeguarding its members, including women, girls, and children from discrimination.

They also joined the call for the proclamation of an international decade of action for the family aimed at closing gaps in mainstreaming a family perspective across the UN system and empowering families to more effectively support the human rights of their members.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (25 country delegations):

*Finland (on behalf of a group of countries), Canada (on behalf of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), Luxembourg (on behalf of BENELUX), Austria (on behalf of a group of countries), European Union, Qatar (on behalf of Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), United Arab Emirates (on behalf of the Group of Arab States (Arab Group), Vanuatu (on behalf of a group of countries), Côte d'Ivoire (on behalf of a group of countries), Qatar, United States of America, Kuwait, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Egypt, Paraguay, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Libya, Sudan, Germany, Morocco, Gabon, Holy See.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (12):

Conseil National des droits de l'homme du Maroc (Morocco), International Planned Parenthood Federation, Alliance Defending Freedom, Hope and Homes for Children, International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development – VIDES, Association for Women's Rights in Development, Action Canada for Population and Development, Make Mothers Matter, International Council Supporting Fair Trial and Human Rights, International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEL), Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, Abshar Atefeha Charity Institute.

International organizations: UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA.

To watch the full meeting refer to the [UN WEB TV](#).