



## **RESPONSE**

*May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

### **20th Anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family**

The United Nations declared 1994 as the International Year of the Family and today, 15<sup>th</sup> May, is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that event. The theme of the year was "Family: Resources and Responsibilities in a Changing World" and its motto was: "Building the Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society". The UN emphasised 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, pursuant to the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”.*

This resonates with the 1983 Vatican Charter of the Rights of the Family, which stated that,

*“Society, and in a particular manner the State and International Organizations, must protect the family through measures of a political, economic, social and juridical character, which aim at consolidating the unity and stability of the family so that it can exercise its specific function”.*

Similarly, Article 18 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of 1981 asserted that,

*“The family shall be the natural unit and basis of society. It shall be protected by the State, which shall take care of its physical health and morals. The State shall have the duty to assist the family which is the custodian of morals and traditional values recognized by the community”.*

Governments, United Nations agencies and bodies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, research and academic institutions, and the private sector are all encouraged to play a supportive role in promoting the objectives of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the benefit of families worldwide.

This anniversary celebration is particularly apposite to South Africa during 2014 as this year sees the implementation of the White Paper on the Family, which seeks to address many of the difficulties and challenges confronting families in all their diversity, and to put in place policies, strategies and services to support, preserve and empower families.

This is an opportunity to review the challenges encountered by families in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to recommend developmental solutions to poverty, civil conflict and aging populations; to sustain intergenerational bonds; to ensure safe environments and to manage the work/home balance. Coherent policies which require co-operation between various stakeholders must enhance the mutual bonds of love, nurture and respect which should constitute healthy family life.

As Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican Observer at the United Nations, stated recently,

*“If respect of the human rights of children measures the health of a society, then the legal recognition of these rights is urgent. The first right of children is that of being born and educated in a welcoming and secure family environment where their physical, psychological and spiritual growth is guaranteed, their potential is developed, and where the awareness of personal dignity becomes the base for relating to others and for confronting the future”.*

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