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UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

ORGANIZATION OF
AFRICAN UNITY

Public Administration, Human Resources
and Social Development Division

**Ad-hoc Expert Group Meeting on the
Impact of Economic and Social Changes
on the African Family**

(Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, 13-17 December 1993)

**REPORT OF THE UN AFRICA AND WESTERN ASIA
PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY**



UNITED NATIONS AFRICA AND WESTERN ASIA
PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY

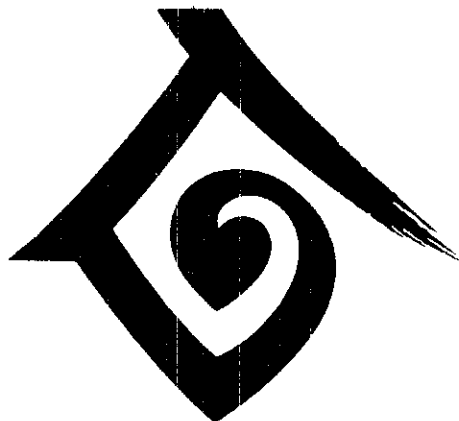
Distr.
LIMITED

IYF/PM.1/10
23 April 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Tunis, 29 March-2 April 1993

Report



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DECLARATION OF TUNIS

The United Nations Africa and Western Asia Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family,

1. Expresses profound appreciation of the forward-looking policy of Tunisia and its President in favour of women and the family, as well as of its commitment to achieving the welfare of citizens in the context of global respect for their economic, social and political rights;
2. Reaffirms support for the declaration by the United Nations of 1994 as the International Year of Family;
3. Expresses the hope that 1994 will offer an opportunity to implement programmes aimed at ensuring to families of the entire world their cohesion, solidarity, justice, prosperity and well-being;
4. Affirms that the family constitutes the basic unit of society and, as such, deserves particular attention. It must benefit from maximum protection and assistance, to be able to assume fully its responsibilities within the community, in accordance with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1/ the International Covenants on Human Rights, 2/ the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, 3/ the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, 4/ the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 5/ as well as the charter of the Organization of African States and the charter of the League of Arab States;
5. Expresses the wish that the International Year of the Family in 1994 will mark the beginning of an era of peace and security for all families of the world;
6. Believes that such conditions can be ensured on the basis of the following principles:
 - (a) Respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual, in the context of the rights and freedoms of others;
 - (b) Rejection of all forms of violence, intolerance, excessive nationalism and religious fanaticism;
 - (c) Positive collaboration between peoples, nations and States, in order to avoid any temptation of hegemony, in keeping with a code of international ethics based upon mutual respect and the exclusion of the use of force;
7. Calls upon African and Arab families to declare themselves in solidarity to better ensure the development of their regions, a condition indispensable for a lasting and beneficial development of their countries;
8. Considers that the families of Africa and the Arab world should benefit, as a legitimate right, from the positive effects of the economic and social development of the world through:
 - (a) The reinforcement of international cooperation in the context of development and solidarity between nations;
 - (b) The lessening of the adverse effects of the debt burden of developing countries in the context of progress and lasting development;

9. Invites Governments to grant special attention to rural families in developing countries, who enjoy least of the benefits of social and economic progress;

10. Calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against migrant families;

11. Draws the attention of Governments to the situation of poor and vulnerable families, so that they should be provided with the moral and spiritual support they require;

12. Encourages public and private institutions in all countries of the world to set up mechanisms of support which help the family, particularly women, to assume the various roles and conditions of modern life imposed on them, especially in the protection the of environment;

13. Calls upon all the fathers and mothers of the world to socialize and educate their children regarding respect for and the dignity of all individuals, without distinction of sex, age, race or social status, in order to prepare them to become responsible citizens of civic and democratic societies;

14. Calls upon political decision makers to elaborate specific legislation favouring the members of the family and enabling each of them to attain social self-realization under equal rights and duties;

15. States that gender equality, equal participation of women in employment, and shared parental responsibilities between husband and wife are essential elements of any modern family policy;

16. Calls upon the international community to strongly condemn the injustices and all kinds of aggression, repression, violence, racism and segregation faced by many families in the world, particularly in Africa and in the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Golan Heights and Lebanon;

17. Calls upon all countries of the world to elaborate policies and strategies for the promotion of the family and to submit them to the international community during the International Year of the Family.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The United Nations Africa and Western Asia Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, on the basis of its examination of the role of the family in the societies of Africa and Western Asia, as well as the national and regional preparations for the Year, adopted the following conclusions and recommendations on policies concerning families and the International Year of the Family, for the consideration of the Governments of countries in those regions as well as concerned organizations.

A. Policies concerning families

2. The Meeting reaffirmed the central role of families as basic units in the societies of Africa and Western Asia. As those societies are undergoing dramatic changes that have a direct impact on families, the need to provide protection to them is more pronounced today than ever before. The Meeting stressed the crucial importance of ensuring that families are supported in meeting the basic needs of all their members and in carrying out their socio-economic and cultural functions for the benefit of societies and nations.

Recommendation 1

To achieve the stated objectives, it is essential to ensure that, first and foremost, measures in all policy areas, both implicit and explicit, contribute to societal conditions favourable to families. A review and appraisal of all current public policies should be undertaken, and policies should be reformulated, if necessary, so that their aggregate impact on the population is "family-friendly".

Recommendation 2

Consideration should be given to the establishment of permanent national high-level organs, which would be responsible for developing, monitoring, evaluating and promoting national policies regarding families, as well as monitoring other policies that may have an impact on families, directly or indirectly.

1. Economic functions of families

3. Small-scale enterprises based upon families contribute very substantial and often dominant proportions of gross national product in most countries of Africa and Western Asia. Consequently, the effective functioning of family enterprises and of family-based support-systems is of central importance to economic and social development. Existing measures in most policy areas, including education policies, do not reflect an appreciation of the centrality of the family as a productive unit nor of its activities, which are vital to the achievement of national economic, social and demographic goals.

Recommendation 3

Policies that affect the economic and social functions of families should be reformulated on the basis of a better understanding of family systems, modes of domestic organization as well as household, economic, social and demographic decision-making processes. They should also take into account intergenerational and gender relations and resource allocations in order to ensure that the policy measures are supportive of familial tasks and activities. In this regard, sufficient and accessible child-care facilities should be available to encourage the full productivity of all family members, especially mothers.

4. A substantial proportion of currently unused entrepreneurial potential exists within the context of family enterprises and support systems. Consequently, policies designed to strengthen small-scale family enterprises will contribute to the development of viable and expanding local economies. This will enhance the economic base without which the productive family unit will be unable to reproduce the labour force and care for dependant members. Many economic policies are often biased against small-scale business activity, which is still largely synonymous with family and other kinship-based enterprises.

Recommendation 4

Economic policy should promote capacity-building, in order to enable families to exercise their initiative more effectively and productively. Appropriate technology should be promoted to enhance family productivity and marketability. Economic policies which seek to mobilize local human, natural and capital resources should fully reflect family enterprises and family-based support systems, which

represent a significant proportion of local economies. Measures should be taken to remove discrimination against small-scale business and rural economic activity. Restrictions upon the establishment of multifamily, mutual self-help associations, such as cooperatives, should be removed. When necessary, for example, in certain sub-regions or sectors of the economy, new programmes should be established to complement such measures.

Recommendation 5

In order to reduce rural-urban migration, special attention should be given to rural development, including infrastructural development and the provision of basic services.

5. Structural adjustment policies have been adopted in many countries to address economic strife. Often, however, such policies have had unintended negative social consequences for families.

Recommendation 6

Structural adjustment policies should include measures which seek to eliminate negative social consequences and provide socio-economic assistance to deprived families and households.

2. Economic and social security

6. Local social security systems based upon kinship have been so severely constrained by recent societal changes that they are no longer capable of meeting the needs of their members. Poverty and destitution occur, and are most difficult to prevent or resolve, among members of the population not covered by contributory social security programmes. Recipients of social assistance are entry points to wider networks of family members and other kinship-based support systems.

Recommendation 7

Every effort should be made to introduce or extend existing schemes of social security and social assistance provided directly to families, particularly to women with young children, female-headed households, widows, elderly women and women with disabilities. Formal social security should be extended to a larger proportion of the population, as modern forms of contributory social security programmes still exclude many categories of individuals. Efforts should also be made to provide and extend non-contributory social assistance programmes as an effective means of breaking the self-perpetuating cycle of poverty. In that regard, attention should be given to achieving a closer association of non-contributory social assistance programmes with existing social services.

3. Promotion of desirable demographically significant behaviour

7. Families continue to be the primary social institution responsible for reproduction. A significant decline in fertility takes place only when couples perceive that security can be assured by means other than high levels of fertility. The adequate provision of social security is also a fundamental means to ensure a rapid demographic transition.

Recommendation 8

To encourage individuals to adopt behaviours likely to lead to reduced fertility, where appropriate, every effort should be made to provide economic and social security, including the extension of innovative social security and social assistance programmes. Policies should promote behaviour patterns that are necessary to achieve the demographic goals of society. Family planning programmes should be substantially expanded and integrated in other relevant programmes for families, as appropriate and culturally relevant.

Recommendation 9

Special attention should be given to family life education. Programmes should reflect the age at which sexual knowledge starts and should include information about physiological and emotional maturity, relationships, responsibility, self-esteem, sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, and biological reproduction. The severe consequences of early pregnancy, unwanted pregnancy and abortions should be reflected in family life education programmes. Knowledge of contraceptive methods and usage should be clearly explained in order to ensure easy understanding.

4. Provision of local services and utilities

8. In many countries, economic, social and environmental crises and political upheavals, including armed conflicts and occupation, have torn families apart and left much of the national infrastructure in ruins, resulting in the deterioration of health facilities, schools, roads, markets, transport systems and other basic services and utilities.

Recommendation 10

Urgent attention must be given to the provision and restoration of basic means and services for families, and to ensuring the accessibility of services, especially to remote rural and poor urban families. Existing services should be revised and strengthened. Attention should also be given to developing staff potential in order to improve accessibility, delivery and coordination of services to families.

5. Training of personnel

Recommendation 11

Policies and programmes regarding families should incorporate adequate measures for the training and retraining of all professionals engaged in the provision of services to families. Particular attention should be given to social welfare workers, whose services are essential for the efficient delivery of social services, preventive and curative interventions, and the care of families facing difficult situations.

6. Promotion of human rights

9. Families serve as an essential medium for promoting respect for human rights of all individuals, including children. However, negative aspects, including exploitation and abuse, and traditional practices, such as sexual mutilation, are also often evident within the family, hindering individual initiative and personal development.

Recommendation 12

Governments, States, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations should pay attention to the particularly dangerous phenomena of terrorism and religious extremism, which threatens the stability of States, the survival of Governments and communities, and, ultimately, the family as the basic foundation of society. A comprehensive study should be conducted on the consequences of terrorism and religious extremism for the family, civil society, and the international community.

Recommendation 13

Policies regarding the family should foster the development of concepts of families and intra-familial relations that are in harmony with basic human rights and individual freedoms. Basic goals in this regard should include the promotion of shared parental responsibilities; recognition of the equal rights of men and women; promotion of the participation of women in gainful employment; and prevention of child labour, sexual mutilation and all traditional practices that jeopardize the moral and spiritual integrity of family members.

7. Cultural strategy in support of families

Recommendation 14

Governments and non-governmental organizations should take steps to establish a cultural strategy to promote the family, including sensitization of men to the rights of women and children, the elaboration of programmes for the advancement of women, and promotion of the rights of children.

8. Protection and development of children

10. A nurturing protective and supportive family environment is essential for the development of children as responsible citizens. Families play an important role in formal and informal education and are active agents for transmitting human values and cultural identity as well as preserving intergenerational links. However, child exploitation and abuse also take place in the context of families.

Recommendation 15

Governments that have not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child ^{5/} are urged to do so as soon as possible.

Recommendation 16

Policies should be developed to ensure that families are able to provide an environment conducive to the positive development of children. They should enable parents to carry out their parenting role in the most effective manner. They should contribute to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. ^{6/} Policies and programmes directed at children should take into account the family environment of the child. Every effort should be made to eliminate child abuse in all its forms, and specific measures should be developed to achieve that goal.

9. Advancement of women

11. Central to the societal goal of advancement of women is the need to ensure that the organization of the family and the allocation of responsibilities and resources within the family are in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. 3/ It is also essential to recognize the key significance of the functions, condition and status of women in the establishment and maintenance of family and kinship-based support systems. The advancement of women will mobilize the productive energy, capability, creativity and potential of the entire human resource base.

Recommendation 17

Governments that have not yet ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are urged to do so as soon as possible.

Recommendation 18

Policies concerning families should effectively contribute to the realization of equal rights for women in the social, economic and political spheres, so that those rights become a central feature of a democratic and participatory pattern of society and development, learned and practiced in the family. They should promote the equal sharing of family functions and responsibilities. Programmes should seek to promote gender equality without leading to dissolution of families.

Recommendation 19

It is essential to repeal laws and reform customary practices which discriminate against women, especially polygamy, so that they can actively participate in all spheres of society, including economic, management and social development planning at the local, national and regional levels.

Recommendation 20

Programmes designed to achieve women's equality should take into account and address the specifics of gender inequality within the family and include incentives and disincentives to effectively persuade men that change must be an essential component of family and community survival strategies in current precarious societal conditions.

Recommendation 21

Measures should be introduced to recognize and account for the socio-economic contributions made by women, including unpaid labour, non-marketed domestic duties and the care and rehabilitation of dysfunctional and elderly persons, through, *inter alia*, the mainstreaming of gender considerations in macroeconomic policies; the promotion of production and marketing cooperatives and women's support networks; and provision of adequate social services. As a direct route to equitable growth and sustainable development, the following should be promoted: differential access to and control, by gender, of various resources and services, including land; agricultural and production technology and resources; extension services; and credit and marketing facilities.

Recommendation 22

The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, to be held at Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995, should be supported by all possible means. Due attention should be given to the linkage between the family and women's issues.

10. Protection and advancement of vulnerable and disadvantaged members of families

12. Families are central in carrying out care-giving functions in society, particularly with regard to the protection and advancement of their vulnerable and disadvantaged members, such as elderly persons and persons with disabilities.

Recommendation 23

Families should be supported in their care-giving functions, especially in current times when public services are being curtailed. A fundamental approach should be to seek to reduce the occurrence of dysfunction, for which families are often the only source of care. Effective use must be made of the resources that families can offer in that regard. Innovative and indigenous approaches should be supported. The considerable experience of local communities should be fully used in monitoring risk, taking preventive action, and providing rehabilitation services.

11. Refugee and migrant families

13. Some 10 million refugees in Africa and Western Asia suffer from cultural and geographical uprooting and the breakup of their families, and are often subjected to violence and harassment.

Recommendation 24

National policies regarding families should incorporate refugee issues. Measures should be taken for the reunification of family members, voluntary repatriation, integration into host communities, and adequate care of unaccompanied minors, including through adoption, when this does not contradict national legislation and policies.

Recommendation 25

Measures should be taken to protect the human rights of migrant families, including freedom of movement, and to ensure their social and economic welfare.

12. Family law

Recommendation 26

Those countries that still do not have a family code should without delay draw up legal instruments pertaining to the various aspects of the family, in accordance with the provisions of relevant international instruments.

Recommendation 27

Family law, including legislation relevant to the formation, change and dissolution of families and other associations based on kinship, to sexual relations within the family, to the rights of spouses, mothers, children and other family members, and to inheritance and domestic violence, should be reviewed and reformed so that they are fully in consonance with the basic human rights of all family members. Revision of family law should be based upon the principles of respect for the rights of association, particularly of the right to form a family, and respect for and protection of the rights of each individual member of an association based upon kinship, including families. Particular attention should be given to establishing gender equality before the law and in all derivative administrative practices. Family legislation and administrative procedures should be progressive and responsive to various family forms and changing familial conditions.

13. Research on family matters

14. Despite the major changes that families have been undergoing, policies and programmes are often not based on up-to-date knowledge. Research and disaggregated data collection, substantiated by accurate and timely statistics, are essential in order to promote family cohesion and develop balanced and appropriate policies and programmes.

Recommendation 28

Data-gathering agencies should collect data on the family as a unit, in order to facilitate systematic studies on families, and to develop intervention measures where necessary. Deficiencies in available information should be identified and data collection improved. Effective use should be made of the census and other sources of data collection in that regard.

14. Good governance

Recommendation 29

Reflecting the goal of democracy within the family, Governments should develop effective strategies and measures to facilitate, monitor and enforce public accountability in the implementation and administration of its programmes, including the introduction of consistently applied rewards and sanctions, and intensive training in ethics and public management.

15. Policies to prevent future problems

Recommendation 30

Governments should develop short-, medium-, and long-term policies to address the problems arising from economic crises, civil strife, social upheaval and economic sanctions, including the problem of refugees, displaced persons and the use and abuse of women and children in all areas. Governments should take all possible steps to resolve conflicts, armed struggle and occupation, in order to avoid the dispersion, destitution and impoverishment of families as a consequence of forced separation of family members and loss of

property and land. They should also take steps to liberate prisoners of war and hostages in order to avoid suffering to, and dispersion of, family members.

Recommendation 31

The United Nations and Governments are called upon to assist States with families suffering under oppression, violence, racism and segregation in Africa, and occupation in Palestine, Lebanon and the Golan Heights, in enabling families to fulfil their functions and rights.

Recommendation 32

Large development projects that require the evacuation of population groups should be thoroughly researched in order to minimize the unintended impoverishment of families, which such development is designed to alleviate.

B. International Year of the Family

15. The International Year of the Family offers each country an invaluable opportunity for serious reflection on well-conceived national strategies to benefit families. Its preparation and observance should lead to the integration of a strong family element in national development strategies and plans. It should also generate adequate discussion of the impact of those strategies and plans on families as units. Both despite and because of the dire socio-economic conditions in several countries of Africa and Western Asia, it is essential to implement those strategies as soon as possible. The Meeting reiterated the relevance and urgency of the various measures for the preparation and observance of the Year that have been recommended by the General Assembly, as applied to the regions of Africa and Western Asia.

1. Preparations for and observance of the International Year of the Family

16. Nationally, it is crucial that effective preparatory and observance measures should be undertaken without delay in countries which have not yet done so. Where preparatory measures are already under way, they should be intensified.

Recommendation 33

All countries should establish a national coordinating committee or similar mechanism for the Year, as recommended by the General Assembly. They should strive to carry out, as appropriate, the functions suggested in relevant documents on the International Year of the Family.

Recommendation 34

Immediate consideration should be given to the issuance of statements by Heads of State or Government calling for nationwide measures to prepare for and observe the Year and announcing policy as well as programme intentions.

Recommendation 35

Specific measures should be taken to obtain the active involvement of every segment of society, in particular the voluntary and private sectors. These should include targeted steps to reach and involve the community and grass-roots organizations as well as families themselves. Local initiatives, in particular, should be given effective support.

Recommendation 36

The active participation of non-governmental organizations should be further encouraged and their efforts supported by substantive, technical and financial means. In particular, full use should be made of their experience and grass-roots links to promote local and national participation and action. They should be fully involved as partners in the government efforts. Governments should take measures to coordinate activities between non-governmental organizations and relevant government agencies.

Recommendation 37

Support for the Year should also be expressed through active participation of the non-governmental community in Africa and Western Asia in the World NGO Forum on Launching of the International Year of the Family, to be held in Malta from 28 November to 2 December 1993. Organizations of the United Nations system should make substantive contributions as well as provide assistance to grass-roots organizations in least-developed and developing countries to enable their representatives to participate in the World NGO Forum.

Recommendation 38

A concerted promotional, educational and information campaign with the full involvement of the mass media should be established. Both the general public and grass-roots and community organizations should be targeted by the campaign.

Recommendation 39

Beginning in 1994, 15 May of every year should be observed as the International Day of Families, as proposed by the Commission for Social Development.

Recommendation 40

The organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system should play an important role in the preparations for and observance of the Year, including the provision of technical assistance. They should include in their programme budgets for 1994 and 1995, as appropriate, programme elements for the observance of and follow-up to the Year.

2. Follow-up to the International Year of the Family

17. The observance of the International Year of the Family should be perceived as a major event in an ongoing and long-term process of supporting families. To ensure that the achievements of the Year are sustained and its impact is maximized, specific follow-up measures are essential.

Recommendation 41

To provide a framework for follow-up to the Year and direction for future work, an international plan of action regarding families should be developed. The plan should focus on activities at local and national level. It should identify priorities on which consensus can be achieved. It should suggest specific measures to foster international cooperation and support on family matters.

Recommendation 42

A United Nations Africa and Western Asia meeting should be held, at the end of 1994 or the beginning of 1995, to evaluate the achievements of the International Year of the Family and to benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas and sharing of experience. The meeting should aim at enhancing interregional cooperation and interaction as well as promoting an active and continuous dialogue and information exchange.

Recommendation 43

Consideration should be given to the creation of an international centre on the family, as an intergovernmental institution, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Its mandate should include ensuring the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Africa and Western Asia Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family; evaluating the impact of policies regarding families in the countries of Africa and Western Asia; and developing new approaches and strategies for the promotion of the family.

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. Opening and duration of the Meeting

18. The United Nations Africa and Western Asia Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, organized by the secretariat for the International Year of the Family in cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESWA), was held at Tunis from 29 March to 2 April 1993 at the invitation of the Government of Tunisia.

19. The Secretary-General, in a message delivered to the Meeting on his behalf, said that as major agents of development, families were deeply involved in issues such as the environment, gender equality, sustainable development and human rights. At the same time, they were seriously threatened by the ravages of war, famine, poverty, drug abuse and crime. He therefore called for effective measures to deal with the particularly difficult problems of migrant, refugee and other families with special needs, and proclaimed his solidarity with a commitment to action on behalf of the families of the world.

20. The Prime Minister of Tunisia described the Meeting as an opportunity to exchange ideas and evaluate prospects for the future, and the Year as a mechanism for addressing the problems encountered by families at the national level and for strengthening the foundations of society. In Tunisia, promotion of the situation of families and of the rights of women had been a national priority

since independence, and the Tunisian family code sought to reconcile traditional and progressive views in a modern civil society that respected both Islamic identity and changing social realities.

21. The newly elected Chairperson expressed the hope that the Meeting would result in concrete working strategies on behalf of families, including measures for the promotion of women and for the full protection of human rights. Its agenda could provide a solid basis for an intensification of the efforts of member States of ECA and ESCWA to achieve the goals of the Year.

22. The Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, said that the Year offered an opportunity to synthesize approaches to a broad spectrum of social issues, and provided a platform for policy reform which could only succeed with the support and empowerment of families themselves. The programme of the Year encompassed five key elements, including: recognition of families as the fundamental group unit of society and of their entitlement to protection by the State; recognition of the diversity of family forms; and respect for gender equality as a key objective of family policy.

B. Attendance

23. The Meeting was attended by representatives of 30 States members of the Economic Commission for Africa, seven States members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and observers for other States and inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations (see annex I).

C. Election of officers

24. At its 1st meeting, on 29 March 1993, the Meeting elected the following officers by acclamation:

Chairperson: Nabiha Gueddana (Tunisia)

Vice-Chairpersons: Ibrahim Allam (Egypt)
Christabel Motsa (Swaziland)
Issa Traore (Guinea)

Rapporteurs: Nimat Kanaan (Lebanon)
Jean-Christophe Tchouatieu-Tchadjou (Cameroon)

D. Agenda and organization of work

25. At its 1st meeting, on 29 March 1993, the Meeting adopted the provisional agenda (IYF/PM.1/1/Rev.1) and draft organization of work (IYF/PM.1/2/Rev.1). The agenda was as follows:

1. Opening of the Meeting.
2. Election of office.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Adoption of the organization of work.
5. The situation of families in Africa and Western Asia and their place in the national social agendas of those regions.
6. National and Regional preparations for the International Year of the Family.

7. Conclusions and recommendations on the national and regional preparations for, observance of and follow-up to the International Year of the Family.
8. Adoption of the report and closure of the Meeting.

26. At its 6th meeting, on 31 March 1993, the Meeting established, on the recommendation of the bureau, an open-ended working group to draft the conclusions and recommendations.

E. Rules of procedure

27. In its proceedings, the Meeting applied the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic, and Social Council.

F. Documentation

28. The Meeting had before it the documents listed in annex II.

III. THE SITUATION OF FAMILIES IN AFRICA AND WESTERN ASIA AND THEIR PLACE IN THE NATIONAL SOCIAL AGENDAS OF THOSE REGIONS

29. In introducing agenda item 5 entitled "The situation of families in Africa and Western Asia and their place in the national social agendas of those regions", a representative of ECA outlined the major issues raised in a paper entitled "The impact of social and economic changes on the African family: policy and programme implications". In the paper, the structures, functions and roles of the traditional African family were described; the impact on families of the African economic crisis of the 1980s, of structural adjustment programmes and of sociopolitical change were analysed; some strategies that families adopted for survival were identified; and policy implications were suggested. A representative of the ESCWA introduced a recent ESCWA study entitled "Impact of social and economic changes on the Arab family: an exploratory study". It concentrated on the education and employment of Arab women as decisive factors of change in the situation of the Arab family. In the study, an overview of the process of transition of Arab society from traditional to modern was presented; the family situation in labour-exporting countries of the region was described; the changes in family functions were analysed; and policy conclusions were drawn.

30. Background papers relating to the item were presented on topics such as the situation of families in English-speaking western Africa, in French-speaking western and central Africa, in eastern and southern Africa, and in North Africa and Western Asia.

31. Representatives of many countries described the central role of families in their societies from political, economic and sociocultural perspectives. They pointed out that while the role and situation of families varied among subregions and even within countries, there were significant common features. Most representatives described the changes that were taking place in the forms, structures and functions of families as a result of the overall changes in societal conditions in Africa and Western Asia. Some of them noted the lack of research and available data on family life in their countries.

32. Most representatives emphasized that the family was the basic unit of society, around which its activities were organized, noting that production, reproduction and the care and socialization of children were the most important functions of families. The provision by families of an environment

conducive to the growth and development of children was regarded as crucial. The economic activities of families and their contributions in generating income and providing employment, particularly in rural areas, was stressed. In most societies, families also continued to play a major role in the provision of care and emotional, financial and material support to their vulnerable members. It was noted that in rapidly changing societies, families were in need of special educational programmes and other supports to effectively fulfil their major roles, and to assist them in solving the social and psychological problems generated by the changing social context. Several representatives stated that strong families were the basis for a strong nation.

33. Most representatives briefly described the process of family formation, which was based on traditional, customary, religious or civil marriage. Polygamy was still prevalent in the rural areas of several countries, while a number of countries had taken measures to prohibit the practice or limit the number of wives. Patriarchal families continued to be the predominant pattern, although the number of female-headed families was increasing. It was noted that divorce, common-law marriages, cohabitation and single-parent families were on the increase, thus influencing family dynamics. The extended family, however, continued to predominate in the regions. Other common features included large family size, agricultural subsistence as the basis of rural family life, and male responsibility for the economic security of the family, although the latter role was slowly changing with the involvement of women in economic and money-producing activities.

34. Most representatives stressed that issues related to the status of women were of intrinsic significance to the promotion of families and integral to family-related policies and programmes. They noted that in order to improve the condition of the family, emancipation and empowerment of women was essential. Though families generally continued to be headed by men, representatives stressed the central role that women played in the family and the need to recognize their contributions, including income-generation. Some referred to the growing reluctance of many men in the African region to fulfil their family responsibilities, and emphasized the need for more intense collaboration between men and women in the enhancement of the family in the new evolving societal context. In that regard, it was noted that income-generating programmes for women were important. One representative stated that the status of women in the family was often unacceptably low, and that promoting the gainful employment of women was an important goal. Several regarded the promotion of female literacy, education and vocational training as essential to improving the condition of the family, and reported on their countries' programmes for women in those areas. Two representatives noted that in order to enhance the status of women, it was necessary to educate and change the attitudes of men. Many emphasized the role of women in economic development, and noted that family policies should contribute to promoting the participation of women in economic and social decision-making. The need for women to have access to extension services, credit facilities and ownership of land was stressed. It was noted that while women had a major responsibility for cultivating land, they could not own land in many countries of the regions. One representative noted the continued legal discrimination between men and women in respect of adultery, despite ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

35. Some representatives described the context and process of framing family-related policies, and noted that those policies could not be developed in isolation from wider socio-economic considerations, including: respect for human rights in the socio-economic and political spheres; the broad goal of sustainable development; and economic liberalization accompanied by measures

to ensure social protection. Objectives of national policies that sought to strengthen families should include the promotion of health services, education, participation of women in development, protection of children in difficult circumstances and provision of adequate housing. The processes included the creation of government structures to deal specifically with family issues as well as the development and designation of a family policy. Other representatives pointed out that their countries did not have a family policy *per se*, but that family issues were dealt with within a wide range of sectoral policies, such as population, health, employment, housing, social security and social welfare. One representative pointed out that in implementing a family policy, a three-phased strategy was adopted, consisting of an institutional strategy of reinforcing the family through legislation, a social strategy of ensuring income security and care of vulnerable members, and an education strategy to create awareness of issues and programmes.

36. A number of representatives stated that the protection of the family was regarded as a State duty, and was guaranteed by the State constitution or law. They described the revisions that had been undertaken and new provisions introduced in that regard. Some representatives noted that new laws had been enacted regarding family formation, divorce and inheritance. It was noted that although the equality of men and women was guaranteed by law, laws pertaining to the family often had a negative effect on women. Furthermore, it was suggested that equality was not consistently enforced nor always taken into consideration in the implementation of the rules and regulations prescribed. Other measures included the promulgation of personal status codes and periodic reform of relevant provisions regarding the family.

37. Many representatives cited a variety of contemporary social problems facing families in the regions, including unemployment, lack of education and delinquency. Those problems had been exacerbated by financial constraints in the private and public sectors, currency devaluation and structural adjustment programmes.

38. Various representatives described the major objectives of policies relating to families. A basic concern was the protection of the family as a social unit and enabling it to carry out its basic functions of reproduction and socialization of children. Family-related policies sought to provide children with basic compulsory education and socialization reflecting the basic human rights of all individuals irrespective of gender or age. Several representative, noted that poverty was a serious social problem and a major cause of the disintegration of the family unit. Other objectives of family-related policies included promotion of child and maternal health as well as health for all by the year 2000. In that connection, the provision of safe water and sanitation was mentioned by several representatives, as was the promotion of decentralized community health centres and the use of non-governmental organizations in the provision of health care. Combating malnutrition, ensuring food security and global immunization and prevention programmes continued to be central goals in the medium term. Other objectives mentioned included: promotion of employment and training for self-employment in the context of structural adjustments; promotion of entrepreneurship; provision of social security; care of persons with disabilities and vulnerable family members; creation of social cohesion in the population; mortality reduction; provision of housing services; protection of the environment; and regulation of rural-to-urban migration. One representative pointed out the need to improve basic services in rural areas, including the promotion of traditional skills, in order to reduce rural-to-urban migration. Some representatives addressed the issue of increasing urbanization as a negative influence on the family, noting that urbanization had brought with it the breakdown of extended family structures and support systems, unemployment, substance abuse, prostitution and increased homelessness and begging.

39. Several representatives highlighted the close interrelatedness of family and population issues, and stressed that the demographic component was important in a family policy. Many reported on the high population growth rates in their countries, ranging from 3 to 4.5 per cent, and accelerating birth rates. One representative noted that in cases where a woman's livelihood depended on her reproductive capacity, it was difficult to reduce fertility rates. Similarly, the absence of social programmes encouraged high birth rates as women's only assurance of support during illness or in old age. The dependence ratio of elderly to young persons was cause for concern for several countries. The percentage of persons aged 15 to 20 years exceeded 50 per cent in some countries of the regions. Family planning programmes, including the provision of contraceptive services and education to promote awareness, were considered essential. Many representatives reported on their countries' programmes regarding education for family life, AIDS awareness and the problem of sexually transmitted diseases, and reiterated the importance of such programmes. Various representatives also emphasized their positive impact on the advancement of women, and the right of women to decide on the number and spacing of children.

40. Many representatives also noted the devastating impact on families of prolonged civil strife and natural calamities. Several described the violation of the basic human rights of individuals and families in areas of armed conflict and civil strife throughout the regions, which led to the fragmentation of families. They noted that the eradication of violence within both the family and society at large was essential for the future development of family life. One representative described the violation of the basic human rights of individuals and families in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank, leading to the breakup of families, contrary to their role as the basic unit of society. It was stated that the right to self-determination was violated, and that families were being subjected to oppressive forms of legislation, acts and laws.

41. The refugee problem had introduced particular challenges to Governments of the regions. Refugee families faced psychological trauma and were fragmented, with members of the same family often dispersed in various countries. Abandonment of children was noted as a major related problem. It was noted that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees sought to promote family reunification, to unite children of deceased parents with blood relatives, and to integrate refugee families in their adopted communities. Other problems included increasing numbers of child soldiers; destroyed infrastructures; shortage of arable land to farm; displacement; forced detention of parents; increased numbers of orphans; increased costs for scarce commodities; currency devaluation; psychological and physical terrorization of families; and shortages of basic services, including housing, education and access to safe water.

42. A few representatives emphasized the importance of addressing traditional habits and ceremonial practices which could have a negative impact on family life, and of considering, for example, the abolition of female circumcision and child labour. In that context, the importance of curtailing fundamentalism in the region in order to improve the status of all family members was noted.

43. Support was expressed for the view that terrorism undertaken in the name of traditional religious views had serious ill effects on families. It was noted, in particular, that Islam called for tolerance and love in support of the family, and had nothing to do with terrorism. In that connection, it was felt that women should not be forced, by their society, to lose their cultural identity because of the resistance to change promoted by some extremist views. It was suggested that the recommendations of the Meeting should reflect that concern.

IV. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY

44. Agenda item b, entitled "National and regional preparations for the International Year of the Family", was introduced by the Coordinator for the International Year of the Family. He identified the major steps involved in the preparations for and observance of the Year, and essential to its success, in particular: a concerted promotional and awareness-raising campaign to inform authorities, organizations and the public of the principles and objectives of the Year; enactment of family-oriented legislation, in consonance with the relevant international declarations and conventions, particularly regarding children and women; and the refinement or promulgation of national policies on the family. He pointed out that the Year provided an opportunity to adopt a comprehensive approach to social issues and concerns centred on the family. He also emphasized the importance of information and the exchange of experience regarding preparations for the Year and planned observance measures.

45. Participants welcomed the proclamation of the Year, which they regarded as a valuable opportunity to improve awareness of family issues, to strengthen the role of the family, to invigorate measures of support, and to promote necessary changes in the organization of interpersonal relations in the family context, so as to ensure recognition of the basic rights of all its members. One representative underlined the importance of the objectives set by the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children adopted by the World Summit on Children, and of empowering parents to fulfil their parenting role. Similar observations were offered on the full realization, in the national setting, of other international instruments, notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. One representative suggested that national action could be organized around the theme of "resource mobilization for survival, protection and promotion of the family unit".

46. The Meeting was informed of the institutional arrangements made or being made for the preparation and observance of the Year. The establishment of a national coordinating committee as the first major step in preparation for the Year was endorsed by many representatives. In several countries, national coordinating committees were headed by or under the patronage of high-level political authorities. Most representatives reported that the members of national coordinating committees represented both governmental and non-governmental organizations, and were multisectoral in nature. Some noted the inclusion of academics, representatives of international organizations and researchers in their committees. Most committees had been mandated to prepare inventories of family-related services, to investigate the situation of families in their countries, to prepare statistics and family data, and to coordinate other preparatory activities. Some representatives noted the role of national coordinating committees in preparing or revising family law and national plans of action. One reported on the adoption of a National Charter on the Family.

47. The active participation of non-governmental organizations and the need to involve all segments of society in the coordinating committees were stressed, in order to maximize available resources and knowledge. One representative of a non-governmental organization noted that it had developed a strategy for the Year based on the preparation of a universal declaration on families, which would represent a consensus between cultures and religions. For that purpose it was in the process of organizing international conferences on various aspects of family rights - social, legal, economic, cultural and political. The establishment of an international honorary committee on the Year, consisting of heads of State or Government, was also proposed.

48. Several representatives reported on the adoption of national programmes of action for the Year, and described the priorities identified and measures taken or planned. Priorities included codification and enactment of laws relating to the family, elderly persons and persons with disabilities; provision of social security; poverty eradication; minimizing the impact of structural adjustment policies; improvement of public health services, particularly in rural areas; improvement and decentralization of basic services; empowerment of small communities to encourage participation in planning, organizing and implementing activities for the Year; agricultural and land use services; promotion of the role of women in development; promotion of women's rights; illiteracy eradication, particularly for women and girls; vocational training, particularly of women; eradication of violence against women and children; responsible parenthood; improvement of the health of the mother and child; promotion of the rights of children and child protection; development of appropriate technologies; international and regional cooperation; and the promotion of relevant international conventions.

49. Specific initiatives included the elaboration of family codes and legislation, particularly to eliminate discrimination against women and children; elaboration of national plans in favour of children; revision of population policy to better reflect family issues; field surveys and studies on the situation and problems of families, their causes and solutions, including disaggregation of national census data to identify family-specific issues; promotion of cooperation among institutions and organizations concerned with the family; and projects on family-income generation.

50. Several representatives stressed the crucial importance of information and awareness-raising activities at the national, provincial and local levels. One reported on the development of materials in local indigenous languages. Effective use of all forms of media was highlighted. Promotional campaigns included publications and handbooks on family issues; organization of national and international seminars and other events; documentary films on family topics; postal stamps; photographic contests and exhibitions; competitions in schools and universities; and use of national and religious festivals. One representative referred to the "Familyfest '93", to be organized by the New Families Movement of the New Humanity, in June 1993, and said that it would be used as a starting point to initiate promotional activities for the Year.

51. Several representatives stressed the need for international cooperation on family issues and stated that, in connection with the Year, they planned to seek greater technical support from international organizations, particularly within the United Nations system. Some specifically invited other participants, and the United Nations, to assist them in preparations for the Year. The representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations noted the importance of developing a broad-based framework for cooperation at the regional level. A number of representatives emphasized the fact that before coming to the Meeting no specific action had yet been taken in their countries for the preparation of the Year. But with the information and experience which they had gained from the Meeting, they would, as soon as they returned to their countries, organize themselves for the elaboration of a programme for the Year, and would keep the secretariat at Vienna informed. Others noted that the recommendations of the Meeting would form the basis for national activities.

52. One representative noted the intention to create a special fund in order to support activities relating to the year. Others commented on the need for additional funding to implement the goals of the Year and its follow-up. In

that connection, several representatives indicated that they had developed proposals for technical assistance projects involving substantial and long-term initiatives on behalf of families, as part of the observance of and follow-up to the Year.

53. A number of representatives stressed that the Year should not be an end in itself, but should lead to a long-term process in support of families. That view was shared by many representatives who stressed the need for infrastructural development in order to meet basic needs.

V. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT AND CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

54. At the 7th meeting, on 2 April 1993, the Preparatory Meeting adopted the report on its proceedings.

55. At the same meeting, the Declaration of Tunis was adopted and a statement was made on behalf of the non-governmental organizations participating in the Meeting.

56. In a closing statement, the Executive Secretary of ECA referred to the severe impact on African families of the critical economic, political and environmental problems facing the region, and stressed the need for greater national and regional efforts to overcome those problems and strengthen families.

57. The Coordinator for the Year presented special testimonials as patrons of the Year to a number of national ministries and coordinating mechanisms in the Africa and Western Asia regions, in recognition of their valuable contribution to the preparations for the Year.

58. In her closing remarks, the Chairperson announced the intention of the Government of Tunisia to increase its contribution to the Voluntary Fund for the International Year of the Family.

59. The participants thanked the Government of Tunisia for generously hosting the meeting.

Notes

- 1/ Resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948.
- 2/ Resolution 2200 A (XXI) of 16 December 1966.
- 3/ Resolution 2542 (XXIV) of 11 December 1969.
- 4/ Resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979.
- 5/ Resolution 44/25, annex, of 20 November 1989.
- 6/ A/45/625, annex.

Annex I

ATTENDANCE

Members

Algeria, Bahrain, Benin, Burkino Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Comoros, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierre Leone, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Swaziland, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen, Zaire

States Members of the United Nations represented by observers

Malta

United Nations Secretariat

Department of Public Information, Economic Commission for Africa, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations bodies

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme

Specialized agencies

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Intergovernmental organizations represented by observers

Arab Labour Organization, League of Arab States

Non-governmental organizations

Category I: International Council of Women, League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Union of Family Organisations

Category II: International Federation for Home Economics, International Federation of Social Workers, Pan African Women's Organization, Socialist International Women, World Movement of Mothers

Other organizations

African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development, African Network for Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect, Centre for African Family Studies, Family Planning Association (Egypt), Florida International University, Kenya Alliance for Advocacy on Children's Rights, Palestine Family Planning