

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
FOR HOME ECONOMICS

POSITION PAPER

on the 10th Anniversary

of the International Year of the Family (1994 – 2004)

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 54/24 proclaimed 2004 as the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

A Draft resolution on Preparations for the Observance of the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF) the UN Commission for Social Development (CSD) was adopted on 21 February 2002.

The objectives of the International Year of the Family were to

- Increase awareness of family issues among governments and the private sector.
- Encourage national institutions to formulate, implement, and monitor family policies.
- Stimulate response to problems affecting and affected by the situations of families
- Enhance the effectiveness of local, regional and national programs for families and strengthen existing support.
- Improve the collaboration among national and international non-governmental organisations in support of multisectoral activities.
- Build upon the results of international activities, concerning women, children, youth, the aged and the disabled, and of other major events of concern to the family and its individual members.

The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) is an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) having consultative relationship with ECOSOC of the United Nations which works in close co-operation with the UN Specialized Agencies, FAO, WHO, UNESCO and UNICEF, as well with the Council of Europe. IFHE was recognised as a lead NGO in support of the United Nations to proclaim the International Year of the Family and was one of the early recipients of the Testimonial of IYF Patrons in 1992.

The objectives of the Follow-up to the IYF are to *mark* the 10th Anniversary and highlight those objectives of the IYF that *have* been implemented to strengthen and support families around the world.

Together with many other INGOs the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) has signed a Statement concerning the 10th Anniversary of IYF. This was presented to the UN Commission for Social Development 42nd Session, 4 -13 February 2004.

IFHE considers the following 2 Paragraphs of the INGO Statement to be of specific importance, that is:

The IFHE recognises that:

“The Family is the basic unit of society and it plays a key role in social development. It is a force of social cohesion and integration. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of families exist. Further IFHE recognises that equality and equity between women and men and respect for the rights of all family members are essential for family well-being and for society at large, and promotes appropriate actions to meet the needs of families and their individual members, particularly in the areas of economic support and provision of social services. Greater attention should be paid to helping the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles, to the causes and consequences of family disintegration, and to the adoption of measures to reconcile work and family life for women and men.”

The IFHE recalls that:

“Helping the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles in contributing to social integration should involve: (a) Encouraging social and economic policies that are designed to meet the needs of families and their individual members, especially the most disadvantaged members, with particular attention to the care of children; (b) Insuring opportunities for family members to understand and meet their social responsibilities; (c) Promoting mutual respect, tolerance and co-operation within the family and within society; (d) Promoting equal partnership between women and men in the family” .

The statement also takes note that in the world of today, society is a complex set of relationships and appears in many forms. There is change over a life cycle of individual families, a family friendly society recognises benefits and problems that the families encounter while fulfilling their function.

The ECOSOC (General Assembly Resolution 57/165, 18. Dec. 2002) indicates 5 major trends affecting families world wide which IFHE will consider and recognises in its works.

1. Changes in family structure

1. a shift from extended to nuclear families, as well as a rise of one-person households and of cohabitation, which became evident during the last 50 years,
2. declining fertility rates, increasing divorce rates and an increase in the number of older persons, all of which result in smaller size households,
3. rising age at first marriage (mid- to late twenties in all regions of the world), and
4. declining numbers of children per family

2. Demographic ageing

Lower fertility rates and a higher life expectancy result in larger numbers of older persons within the overall population, with strong implications for families

3. Rise of migration

Seasonal and internal migration of men contributes to higher numbers of female-headed households around the world. Migration can also cause major stress when families are confronted with cultural, racial and religious differences, and with integration issues.

4. The HIV/AIDS pandemic

It affects the most productive members of society, often as they start their own families. This leads to changed family structures, adolescent- or grand parent-headed households are increasingly encountered in some regions of Africa. These families must cope with the trauma of losing family members, and still care for infected family members and the increasing number of orphans, all of which causes stress on families and societies.

5. The impact of globalisation

This often means a reduction of services for families due to spending cuts in the area of education and health, in unemployment benefits as well as in general welfare provisions.

All of these outlined trends put greater strain on families regarding their societal function. (Family Matters, circular no. 45, August 2003).

Families and their members are experts in their own affairs and should be enabled to fulfil these important roles and tasks, to carry out their functions. The family household is the one universal human institution where its members are hopefully embedded for most of their lives, where they can develop their vital relationships including the creation of life, birth, childhood, education, marriage, parenting, retirement and death. This is where men and women and generations come together and live together; this is where most personal decisions are made which in their accumulating totality condition the future of a society in the context of its past. In order to fulfil these tasks under various, and often complex everyday conditions men and women, boys and girls, must be equipped with necessary life skills and everyday competencies. Home Economics education is an important instrument to serve these needed requirements.

The Challenge for Home Economists:

Sustaining a better quality of life

At present, individualism, pluralism of life-styles, flexibility of working-life and family biographies, changing values, family structures, demographic trends and globalisation determine the daily life of each human being.

Educational issues and lessons conveying knowledge and competence on nutrition, health, consumer behaviour, home management, time and money management, child care, caring for elderly and others, all of these are vital for the maintenance of family household and family life, to sustain a better quality of life.

There is an extended need for future-oriented science and research, for home- and family-related education, training and advising which is on the one hand is based on general education and on the other hand is rooted in the professionally oriented education for both sexes.

Conveying life competencies

Home Economics, a body of knowledge and practice, covers a range of household-related disciplines. It has a variety of professional and academic faces in the different countries of the world, but a commitment to “The study of household management for achieving the highest quality of life” and which will suit them all.

Home Economics is an applied human science. It needs the human science methodologies to legitimise its research findings as Home Economics theory. This also includes the observational competencies of the personal family oriented practices of every day life of people in their social networks as well as technically and culturally competent management of the life-style technologies for sustaining everyday life. A good theory has to be practical. Home Economists have to establish and must teach such vital and culturally integrated theory for human capacity-building and survival.

Home Economics must be seen in the context of Family Studies, and vice versa, in a holistic context. Home Economics must be seen as the science of the everyday activities of living and working together in the varieties of life forms, life situations, generations and gender-relations, everyday cultures and freedom of action.

Goals set for beyond 10th Anniversary of IYF

Strengthen political activities:

At the national and international level the home economics position is still receiving insufficient attention from society, both with regard to the macro-perspective of the UN Human Development Report, and a wider socio-political publicity at all levels.

The importance of home economics competence for every day life, of every human being, for the family, for the society, not just for survival but to gain better quality of life, must be recognised by politicians and decisions makers and made economically feasible. These competencies must become socially accepted and culturally desired.

Expand home economics education, counselling programs and family support systems:

It can be recognised world wide that the government and the public sector cut down on family support systems. Considering the demographic changes, an ever greater need arises for care and support in the households. As a result, household and family related competencies become even more essential to improve the potential of families to face these challenges. Home economics education should become a “must” for both genders.

Mission of IFHE

The International Federation for Home Economics, founded in 1908, is the unique, world-wide professional organisation concerned with the promotion of home economics. It brings together institutions, organisations, associations and individuals dedicated to further both formal and informal home economics education.

The Mission of the International Federation for Home Economics is to provide an international forum for home economists to develop and express the home economics concerns for individuals, families and households at the United Nations together with other International Non-governmental Organisations whose interests parallel those of home economics.

Its aims are to promote awareness that families and households are the prime nurturing environment for every human being and to promote the concept of families and households as operating within a larger social, economic and physical environment, and also to press for the recognition of the need for education for home and family life in all areas, for both genders, for all age levels and in all societies.

The IFHE acknowledges that home economics science, research, education and training support families, provide necessary knowledge and competencies, and contribute to the services which individuals and families need for the benefit of all society.

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