

We express our sincere gratitude to the statement Drafting Committee,

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For their excellent Team work, contribution and endeavour in preparing the following statement which marked the conclusion of the world Congress “**Restore Family Life and Sustain World Peace**”, January 2-6, 2006, Chennai, India.

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STATEMENT

2ND WORLD CONGRESS AND 11TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE FAMILY: RESTORE FAMILY LIFE AND SUSTAIN WORLD PEACE JANUARY 2 – 6, 2006 CHENNAI, INDIA

PREAMBLE

1. The 2nd World Congress on the Family, organized by Service and Research Foundation of Asia on Family and Culture (SERFAC), was held from 2 to 6 January 2006 at the Aruna Hotel, in Chennai, India. It also marked the 20th Anniversary of SERFAC. The Congress attracted 162 participants from 20 countries - Australia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Canada, Germany, Hongkong, India, Indonesia, Latvia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, The Philippines and the United States of America. Participants were mainly professionals, religious groups, and from grassroots non-government organisations.

2. The goal of the Congress was to increase greater awareness of the need to strengthen and build family life for peace in the family and peace in the world. Its specific objectives were:
 - a. to provide a platform for exchange and networking on major family issues, policies, research and programmes;
 - b. to highlight the systemic impact of HIV/AIDS, its consequence on the family and to call for concerted and sustained action to restore family life, social relationships and social responsibilities;
 - c. to motivate NGOs, government and intergovernmental bodies to develop and implement action for, and on behalf, of the family and
 - d. to ensure effective follow-up action as part of an ongoing process towards a more family-friendly and peace-oriented society.
3. The World Congress was inaugurated by Dr. D. Viswanathan, Vice Chancellor of Anna University. Dr H.B. Danesh, Founder and Director of the International Education for Peace Institute set the tone of the Congress as the Keynote Speaker.
4. Building stable marriages and healthy family life with a culture of peace is a great challenge facing humanity today. Peace is not the absence of war nor can peace be imposed from the outside. Peace needs to be developed from within the individual and the family in order to extend to the larger society. The Congress examined factors that contribute to conflict in the family and factors that would nurture and contribute to peace in the family and society.
5. We believe that the family is the workshop of civilization. Family teaches us to be human: to know, to love and to be able to choose wisely. We are also aware of the manifold forces that impinge on the family. As participants of this “World Congress on the Family: Restore Family Life and Sustain World Peace”, we are saddened by the progressive disintegration of marriage and family life. The contemporary social contexts, characterized by extreme poverty, gender discrimination, deterioration of the environment and growing militarism do not promote family values.
6. The Conference looked at these forces along with technology, including biotechnology, politics, religion, and the growing pandemic HIV/AIDS. The concerns for building strong and healthy families have made us enquire into the forces, which help build a culture of love in the family and peace in the world.

The Family in Contemporary Social Contexts

7. Diversity of faiths, values and worldviews characterizes the face of families both in the East and West. However, there are some overall similarities reflected in the roles and obligations related to the concept of ‘place’; the

concept of 'face' and the significance of spirituality in marital and social relationships.

8. Peace and harmony can be nurtured only when all parties involved in any interaction can appreciate that the mutual goals of care, protection, and security must be the reasons underlying what seem to be rigid expectations found in families and social relationships in the East.
9. In the West, the high rate of divorce, the decreasing interest in marriage and the decline in the number of children in the context of aging communities is putting new and ominous pressure on the institution of the family. Furthermore, there is evidence that the same pattern is occurring in other parts of the world, particularly among the more educated and financially endowed families.

Poverty and Family

10. Poverty is a global problem and is recognized as an affront to human dignity and family life. It is imperative that we eliminate poverty and promote human dignity, justice and equity, focusing on security of families rather than territories. These threats to human security include social inequality, gender imbalance, poverty, and forced migration.
11. The persistent problem of poverty calls for action at the grassroot level and civic institutions along with governments and international institutions.

Gender Equality and Family

12. Gender inequality exists in the social sphere, either subtly or overtly. Women are viewed as weaker and less capable than men and have less access to resources. Women are often not included in decisions that impact family and community. There is a need for men to undergo a change of heart so that they assume greater responsibilities in the family.
13. Gender equality needs to be promoted through creation of awareness in parents wherein complementarity of roles is stressed, and sons and daughters are given equal opportunities to education, among other things.

Environment and Family

14. Social problems, family disintegration, and poor quality of life are associated with environmental degradation. Protection of natural capital should be imperatively practiced and monitored at all levels, from national policy design to project execution. Key economic performance indicators must be viewed

against environmental standards. Environmental preservation must be a priority concern of governments because of its far-reaching impact on the lives of families and communities.

Towards Ending the Evils of Militarism.

15. Despite the end of the War, most countries have increased their spending on military at a faster pace than their rate of growth in GDP. Further, there are still over 27,000 nuclear warheads in deployment today, posing grave dangers of massive deaths and destruction from potential military confrontation, accidental launching of missiles, and unauthorized transfer of radioactive material and weaponry into the hands of terrorists.
16. If the resources expended on military build-up can be utilized for development, global poverty can be addressed far more effectively.
17. One of the main reasons for militarism is the mindset of the people in general, and their leaders in particular, that hinder the resolution of both internal and external conflicts through peaceful means.
18. The challenge we face as a human race is about how to get on the “right side” – of peace, non-violence, disarmament, and development of human and natural resources for productive use.

Impact of Technological Changes on the Family

19. The global technological revolution currently taking place has contributed to the well-being of some sections of society. As a tool, technology offers new opportunities for human development, especially in poverty reduction, education, and health care.
20. The dangers posed by the introduction of a wide range of new technologies without proper safeguards include excessive consumerism, environmental degradation, violation of generally accepted ethical and moral standards, and materialization of personal relationships. Further, advances in communications technology, especially those offered through the media, have the potential to adversely impact the character, values and conduct of large numbers of people, and in particular, those of children and young adults.
21. The benefits of new technologies are yet to be distributed evenly throughout all segments of society. The rural sector where a great majority of people’s lives are lacking in adequate “enabling” technologies that is appropriate for poverty alleviation and development.

22. The challenge and the need is in applying new technologies to empower families, bridge relationships between peoples of different nationalities, cultures and backgrounds, and improve the quality of life of all people.

Corporate Responsibility and Family

23. While the majority of corporate bodies do not directly and actively concern themselves with the welfare of the family, we appreciate that some do. They are deeply aware of families of employees in keeping them productive and happy. They promote the total well-being of the employees through welfare and cultural programmes for the family, self-employment training for spouses and educational programmes for children. They promote healthy social interaction among employees and strengthen the social network.

Role of Religions and Family

24. The world's four major religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam – have the same expressed goal and purpose – to enable the human person to achieve liberation and fulfillment through discharging his/her duties and obligations in family and social life. However, in practice, religions not infrequently are the cause of conflicts, strife and even violence, because of the failure to put the enlightened teachings of these religions into practice. It was also noted that there is a growing hunger for spirituality even among those who do not practice any religion or have fallen away from their origin.
25. A more determined effort on the part of the religions to propagate effectively their teachings on human brotherhood, non-violence and peace among their followers, could contribute to a better state of the world.

The Threat posed by HIV/AIDS and the Role of Biosciences – Need for Empowering the Family

26. Modern technology brings to us many advantages and disadvantages. Instead of being guided by an inner ethic of values and conviction, it is often circumstances, environment, consumer culture and persuasive advertising that control the way we use technology. It is important to educate and conscientise individuals, families and communities to help them see technology in the biosciences as subservient to divine purposes and to appropriate them for our well-being and fullness of life.
27. The HIV /AIDS pandemic has brought more challenges to the family than any other phenomenon, to the extent that it has been suggested that the families of those affected face total disintegration. The family needs to be empowered in order to deal with the pandemic. More research needs to be conducted and a

family-centered approach should be adopted in implementing programmes focusing on individuals and the family.

Building and Sustaining a Culture of Peace in Family and Society

28. The foundation of every culture is its understanding of civilization which needs to be transferred to the next generation. At the core of the culture of peace is the education of every succeeding generation on the nature, principles and practices of peace.
29. A culture of peace – inner, inter familial interpersonal, interfamilier, intergroup, international – is one in which no one should be excluded from the fundamental processes of democracy, equality, freedom and justice. Inherent in the concept of culture of peace is the notion that peace is an expression and outcome of an integrated and comprehensive education of every new generation within the parameters of worldview based on the principles of peace.
30. Building and sustaining a culture of peace begins with the individual. It can start with the way we nurture our children – even before conception. With better understanding of children’s development and children’s needs as well as parents’ own needs as individuals, husbands and wives, children stand a better chance of growing up in a harmonious family.
31. Families should be encouraged to examine the dynamics of the relationships among their members so as to make harmonious adjustments. Families must develop the skills to deal with the society both in individual, family and group capacities.
32. The culture of peace should be developed in the adult self, who is also a moral and spiritual self and, hence, a foundation for peace. Helping the individual realize full human adulthood will be a pre-requisite for personal maturity and social harmony. Intimacy, which is allowing one’s inner spirit to be touched by another, should be nurtured since this is the foundation of a stable and solid family life.
33. The fundamental reality of human well-being and integral sustainable peace and development lies in right relationships dynamically organized both at the level of the person family and of society. The human being is a composite of diverse interlocking components all of which need nurturing for personality development. The nurture comes from meeting the needs of the person, which is to be aided by the family and by programmes run by governments and private institutions. Peace and harmony are the outcome of such rightly ordered programmes of development.

Special Interest Workshops

34. A series of workshops for more in-depth examination of issues and acquisition of skills were conducted over 3 days to address different approaches to achieving peace within the family. Participants gained insights and skills in the use of some of these approaches which range from a spiritual approach to peace, effective parenting in the early years, engaging youths for community action, human sexuality education, insights for personal growth, methods of natural family planning, and interventions in substance abuse. Special needs of families such as family mediation during separation/divorce, preventive and remedial interventions for violence in the family, HIV/AIDS, migrating and displaced families, education for peace and renewing and remaking societies were discussed.

World Roundup

35. To learn about new and successful programmes on the Family in different parts of the world, Twenty-four programmes were presented. They range from early support and intervention in young families to different social services for the family, family life education, support for children and families with special needs and education against consumerism and for peace.

Conclusion

At the Conclusion of this World Congress “Restore Family Life and Sustain World Peace” in which delegates from all continents were present expressed happiness at the many initiatives taken all over the World in the Service of the Family and in particular the initiatives and services rendered by SERFAC during the last twenty years. This anniversary was marked by the release of a Souvenir and the Inauguration of the Graduate Course in Family Studies and Counselling, which will commence on its premises in Varadarajapuram, Chennai, India from June 2006.

Recommendations

36. Parent education and parent support should begin upon conception, and proceed through birth and the early years to strengthen parents’ understanding and skills in nurturing their children. Health agencies, hospitals, social service agencies and various religious institutions need to develop outreach programmes to pregnant women, fathers, and parents with young children.

37. National governments should legislate laws to protect the dignity and rights of women, providing them with greater access to education, health care, and work opportunities, and offer programmes for empowering men as well.
38. Commercial organizations must be held to a higher standard to ensure that their products and services offered as a result of advances in technology do not cause harm to society. Governments must enact and enforce appropriate laws to protect the legitimate interests of individuals and families, without curbing innovation and investment in new and superior technologies.
39. Families must be encouraged and be supported by employers and community-based organizations to make necessary adjustments to properly utilize new technologies as a positive constructive tool. Children need to be guided at home and school through the wide range of consumer choices they have by building awareness about the positive and negative effects of these goods and offer positive alternatives, examples and role models.
40. Global militarism and violence will be reduced if and when the world truly embraces the principles of peaceful resolution of conflicts and tolerance of diversity. These important values are best taught in families and in classrooms. Our children must grow up with the conviction that non-violence and peaceful resolution of conflict are essential to our survival as a human race.
41. In order that we face up to the challenge of reducing militarism before it is too late, a global dialogue must begin immediately. The United Nations must urge national governments to seriously debate the issues of ending war and declaring it unlawful under international laws. We also recommend that the media be used for promotion of peace, development, equality and education of children, youth, and members of 'family as a unit'.
42. We urge the United Nations, national governments, religious organizations, and other institutions of good-will to actively engage in a concerted effort to end internal and external conflict currently taking place in different parts of the world and positively and concretely start 'Education for Family and Peace programmes'