

Office of the Family UPFI Honors the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

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New York, USA - Commemorating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the NGO Committee on the Family, NY co-sponsored with Universal Peace Federation the hybrid program, "Harmonizing Children's and Parents' Rights in Children's Education" on November 18, 2021. From our two experts, the philosophical underpinning of these rights was first discussed followed by grassroots examples of the collaboration of parents, faith-based NGOs, and governments addressing these rights in different areas of the world.

Dr. Patrick Lee, professor of philosophy and director of the Center for Bioethics at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, explained how personal relationships and connections naturally generate special responsibilities even when involuntary, such as a child's responsibility to

his/or her parents. Dr. Lee said that as we are directly connected to our community of relationships, the wellbeing of those people becomes our moral responsibility, especially when there are biological ties such as with the family. He stressed that the natural obligation of responsibility within the family is pre-political, that is, existing and functioning outside of the political or governmental domain.

Although today's culture tends to deny the impact of biology, he argued that the human body gives an objective structure intrinsic to the self and our consciousness and therefore, also our family relationships. From the sexual union of a mother and father, the genetic union that creates and determines individual traits, looks, health, etc. of the child unquestionably impacts the child throughout life, that is, the union, of the three continues prominently within every individual. Furthermore, as children are born needing love, care, and direction from his or her parents, those mutual biological bonds increase the likelihood that the parents will provide the dedicated care the child requires to thrive. The parent has a unique responsibility to provide the nurturing and directing for the child until full development, physically, intellectually, emotionally, morally, and religiously, until the child can take on responsibility for his or her life on their own. No government or agency can replace this level of care and concern. The parents are the most dedicated to their child's whole development and well-being for life and know their child's needs and talents the best. Though adoptive parents can take on this full responsibility, in contrast, the kind of needed parental care and concern are not fully transferrable to a hired childcare provider. In terms of academic education, parents again take on full responsibility for the education of the child, and though often others outside the family are needed to provide education, this outside education is subsidiary to the parents' responsibility for the child's education.

Regarding the state's responsibilities to children, Dr. Lee indicated that the state exists to protect and promote the fulfillment of the natural intrinsic goods, that is natural social relationships, within its members. The family is the natural and unique resource of human development and fulfillment that deserves the state's recognition, welcoming, and support. The state has an obligation not only to respect

this pre-political essence of the family but to not arbitrarily intrude. Certainly, when there are clear reasons such as severe neglect, abuse, or threat to public safety, the state has an obligation to intervene. This kind of governmental involvement is appropriate for its role of supporting and protecting individuals, families, and society.

The next speaker was Nuno Crisostomo, who is a UNICEF Emergency Specialist with 33 years of experience working for children's welfare in over 70 countries. He commented on the vast and positive impact of the Declaration on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ever since its inception in 1989. The improvement in children's education around the world since CRC is unquestionable. He said that the partnership between parents, the government, and faith-based organizations in his experience has been the key to the headway made for children over these decades and this collaboration will continue to be the key. However, he pointed out that the quality of education still remains in need of much improvement.

Crisostomo noted during his three years serving in the Republic of Congo during the pandemic, it was the parents that cared most about the children's education and not the teachers. In his view, crises such as the pandemic are most often dealt with by the parents. This was the case as a large percentage of parents started homeschooling their children, making a substantial difference for maintaining their children's education. Crisostomo gave another example of parents' influence in Portugal. The parents were required to send their children to a course on citizenship which came from a dictatorship perspective, a perspective with which they did not agree. A large number of parents fought that mandate until finally the Portugal Supreme Court granted parents the freedom to opt out of this course.

Another point made by Crisostomo was that for decades, over and over again, wherever he went, the push and emphasis was for educating girls, not boys and not including fathers. In Lesotho, in fact, he observed that it was the boys who were working in the fields and not going to school while the girls were getting education. In summary, he said sometimes plain old common sense should be followed, such as focusing on both boys and girls, and recognizing, honoring, and utilizing parents' unique care and concern for their children. It was clear that Crisostomo was speaking not only as a professional with a wealth of grassroots experience but as a father with the irreplaceable caring from a parent's heart.