

The 2019 Global Day of Parents was commemorated by a program at UN HQ

Lynn Walsh
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New York, United States -- The 2019 Global Day of Parents was commemorated by a program at UN Headquarters titled "Good Parents Build Good Societies: The Importance of Motherhood and Fatherhood."

The event was sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Djibouti, co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Belarus and the Permanent Observer of the Holy See, and organized by Universal Peace Federation. The June 11 meeting was held in the ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) Chamber.

Tageldin Hamad, vice president of Universal Peace Federation International, moderated the first session by introducing the UN delegates. The first remarks were given by Mr. Youssouf Aden Moussa, counselor to the Permanent Mission of Djibouti to the UN, representing the ambassador of Djibouti, H.E. Mohamed Siad Doualeh.

Mr. Moussa raised the point that society is dependent on the family for its very existence and survival. "Every society, to keep alive itself, requires the family per se, a mother and a father plus children," he stated. "Therefore, we must take into serious consideration the role and action of the parenting. Any problem that affects parenting will be a social problem."

Mr. Moussa explained that the partnership created between a mother and father teaches their children relationship building. This ability is essential, he pointed out, for a child to develop a healthy identity, social capacities, and interdependence on every level of functioning. He added that parents' unique role in instilling moral values and pro-social responsibilities in their children is fundamental for the healthy functioning of society. He concluded by encouraging all member states and the international community to create and promote family-oriented programs and policies.

H.E. Valentin Rybakov, the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the UN, stated that the Global Day of Parents is a substantial addition to the numerous national commemorations of mothers and fathers as well as other UN Days such as Universal Children's Day and the International Day of Families. He reported that the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) recently proclaimed the first ever Global Children's Month of June as an affirmation of the significance of motherhood and fatherhood.

H.E. Rybakov recognized that parental involvement in the first three years is particularly important for the optimal development of children and added that, of course, parental love, education, and care continue to be important throughout every child's life. He stressed that the family starts with the mother and father, and that, united together, both parents provide the key protective environment in which children can learn, develop, and receive the essential factor of parental love.

This parental foundation, essential for every child, builds societal stability and well-being, which are

essential for social sustainability, he explained. That is why protecting motherhood and fatherhood is one of Belarus' priorities in social policy and programs, he said.

He spoke appreciatively of the UN Group of Friends of the Family, comprising 25 missions at the UN that are actively protecting and promoting parents and the natural family. With applause, the audience in turn expressed their appreciation of H.E. Rybakov and Belarus for taking leadership for much of the work done at the UN by the Group of Friends of the Family.

Monsignor Tomasz Grysa, deputy permanent observer of the Mission of the Holy See to the UN, discussed the responsibility of mothers and fathers in educating their children and therefore building a good society. He explained that the sexual differentiations of males and females, due to innate genetics, endocrinology and neurology, are lived in their fullest in the reciprocity and complementarity of a mother and father in the family.

According to Msgr. Grysa, children have the greatest opportunity to develop their personhood and to discover their personal identity when experiencing the love and emotional and biological synergy between their mother and father. Because of the unique procreative mother-father-child relationship, he argued, the family has the right to be recognized as the primary pedagogical environment for personal and social education, including children's "affective and sex education, within the broader framework of an education for love and mutual self-giving."

Because of these unique, natural, and relational benefits, children have a fundamental right to be raised in a family with a mother and father, Msgr. Grysa stated. He explained that as culture reduces human sexuality to mere physical pleasure seen as an end in itself, united parents can educate children to understand sexuality as the "truly and fully personal enrichment of the whole person -- body, emotions, and soul -- which manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love."

Currently there is a crisis in education of youth, as there is a lack of respect for and even an undermining of parents' rights and responsibilities to educate their children, Msgr. Grysa said. He stressed that as human formation is so critical and parents are the primary educators, a better alliance between family, school, church, and society must be established which cooperates with and complements the parents' rights and roles. Such a reconstructed parent-centered alliance will foster children's education based on an "integral anthropology, capable of harmonizing a person's physical, psychic, and spiritual identity," Msgr. Grysa said. He concluded by saying that recognizing the unique capacities and responsibilities of mothers and fathers will address some of the most troubling challenges of our society and build "resilient societies and best ensure for children the possibility of enduring happiness."

The second session was moderated by Lynn Walsh, the director of the UPF Office of the Family. The first speaker for this panel was Erica Komisar, LCSW (licensed clinical social worker), parenting coach, psychoanalyst and author of *Being There: Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matters*. Mrs. Komisar said despite plentiful talk about the importance of family, the family is undervalued and our children are not getting what they critically need. The consequences are evident in the rise of medication prescribed to two- and three-year-old children for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and depression, the fact that one in five youth 18 years old and younger are diagnosed with a mental disorder, and a 400 percent increase in psycho-pharmacological drugs prescribed to youth from 12 to 18 years old, she reported.

Abundant research links this pervasive mental illness of children to the inadequate presence and lack of responsiveness of the mother (or primary caregiver) in the first 1,000 days of a child's life, Mrs. Komisar said. She stressed that although many parents have no choice but to work and place their child in childcare, we need to understand the clear neurological needs of young children for optimal development. Then we can make better choices about being present with our children as much as possible and improve our parenting sensitivities.

Mrs. Komisar described some of the unique differences in the parenting of mothers and fathers directly related to the biological, hormonal and neurological makeup of women and men. She explained that mothers, primed by oxytocin, are the "attachment object" and more naturally respond empathically to help their baby regulate his/her emotions and handle stress. This critical mother-child interaction is the only way children eventually learn to regulate their own emotions, she added.

Fathers, as the "separation object," provide another critical but different role, stimulating child's play and exploration which lead to the child's healthy separation from the mother, Mrs. Komisar explained. The good news she gave was that fathers can learn to be more empathic if they are the primary caregiver and both parents can be taught how to develop the responsiveness and presence that all children need.

We need to be honest about how much attention babies truly need for their healthy development, Mrs. Komisar said. This means that babies' developmental requirements need to be put before a career, when at all possible. She implored women especially to realize that they can "do it all" but definitely "not all at the

same time." She explained that the window of optimal development for children is not that long, and there is plenty of time to launch into a career once children have grown out of the most vulnerable period.

The next speaker, Grace Melton, an associate at the Heritage Foundation for social issues at the UN -- and herself the mother of six -- addressed the topic "United Mothers and Fathers Benefit Children and Social Development." She began by stating that the natural family springs from the marriage of one man and one woman and that this union is the best resource any society has for raising children to become responsible, healthy adults who can contribute positively to societal sustainability.



Echoing other speakers, Mrs. Melton commented that as men and women are equal but not the same, mothers and fathers are not interchangeable and children need and deserve both. She referred to a statement given by her colleague Ryan Anderson on the impact of marriage, saying, "Marriage plays a fundamental role in civil society because it is characterized by sexual complementarity, monogamy exclusivity, and permanence. These marriage norms encourage men and women to commit permanently and exclusively to each other and take responsibility for their children."

Mrs. Melton presented an abundance of empirical social science research throughout her presentation. She indicated that children from single parents experience an increased risk of developmental delay, performing poorly in school, and twice the rate of emotional and behavioral problems as children raised by their mother and father.

Children of divorced parents experience a significantly higher rate of psychological distress and suicide, Mrs. Melton said. They are less healthy and experience significantly more physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in all other forms of the family (especially those living with a parent and a non-related partner) compared to those raised by their intact married parents. Mrs. Melton reported that children raised in broken families are two to four times more likely to be incarcerated than those raised by their married mother and father. Children in broken or never-married families are 82 percent more likely to live in poverty than those in intact married families, she stated.

Mrs. Melton reminded us that when families disintegrate, there is not just great personal/emotional cost but also societal cost, due to the remedies needed for the increase in poverty, poor mental and physical health, and crime. She quoted researcher Mark Regnerus' statement, "Insofar as the share of intact, biological mother/father families continues to shrink in the United States, as it has, this portends growing challenges within families, but also heightened dependence on public health organizations, federal and state public assistance, psychotherapeutic resources, substance use programs, and the criminal justice system." She commented that the family is clearly under attack on many levels -- and this must be addressed.

Mrs. Melton reminded us of the importance of adhering to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which stated that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to

protection by society and the state." She said there is serious concern that instead we are witnessing the family being devalued and undermined, even by some at the UN. It is critical that laws and policies protect marriage and the family, in order to safeguard the vast benefits that only the natural family can provide, she said. By honoring and protecting the natural family as declared by the UDHR, the family will fulfill its unique function and assure the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), she said.

Our final speaker was Jonathan Schweppe, director of policy and government at the American Principles Project and an obviously enamored father of two boys. In addressing the importance of the family, he emphasized the role of the father.

"The family is the most important natural institution in the history of the world," he said. "It provides a bulwark against so many of society's ills: drugs, crime, poverty, moral decay. Simply put, the family provides a structural framework for the formation of citizens, teaching and preserving virtues and values across cultures. Sadly, this institution has arrived at a state of crisis, and the major catalyst to this decline has been the loss of fathers in the home."

Mr. Schweppe indicated the magnitude of father-absence by reporting that more than one in four children in the United States -- or 19.7 million children -- are fatherless. The undeniable advantages of well-fathered children are measurable in the areas of physical and mental health, school performance including college attendance, success in future marriage and in decreased poverty, crime, substance abuse, and violent and promiscuous behavior, he said.

Abundant research indicates that the family formation one grows up in and then forms or fails to form as an adult is recognized as "a significant, if not the most significant, determinant of poverty," Mr. Schweppe said. Having a married mother and father is the greatest advantage and protection a child can have for multiple areas of well-being, which continues into adulthood, he summarized.

Mr. Schweppe discussed the significant positive impact that fatherhood has on men, as it forces them to move from "dependency to dependability." He said, "If marriage lights a proverbial 'fire in the belly' when it comes to male development, fatherhood is like pouring on the gasoline."

Referring to the National Survey of Families and Households, he summarized that when men become fathers, they improve in social participation, develop extended and intergenerational family relations, and increase their working hours and service hours. Mr. Schweppe added that the increase in married fathers' working hours and work ethic results in a significant increase in income compared to unmarried men, measured at more than \$16,000 annually. The benefit of fatherhood to any national economy should be obvious.

In his final points, Mr. Schweppe urged governments to heed three areas of pro-family policies. First, he criticized public housing policies that raise the rent when the father is living with his family and brings in income. This incentivizes family disintegration and fatherlessness in the most vulnerable populations.

Mr. Schweppe next addressed the need for practical solutions for paid family leave, so that all parents, but especially those with lower incomes, can stay home to care for their young children. He said the failure to provide paid family leave results in married couples' misconception of children as an unaffordable luxury, instead of the greatest joy and purpose in life.

His final point was that the fundamental rights of parents to make decisions about the upbringing, education, curricula, and medical care of their children must be given back to parents. He implored elected officials to defend these fundamental rights of parents, as parents know and love their children as no one else in the world.

Mr. Schweppe concluded that the evidence is compelling that worldwide, children pay the price for broken marriages and father absence. He encouraged us by saying that many of the challenges and obstacles that children suffer are avoidable and will decrease with concerted efforts to strengthen marriage and responsible fatherhood -- making society stable and all family members happier too.