

UPF International: Challenges to Empowering Families in UN Negotiations

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January 22, 2026
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New York, United States - On January 22, 2026, the Universal Peace Federation, as an executive member of the NGO Committee on the Family, NY, at the United Nations, co-organized a virtual program titled, "Empowering the Family through National Policies: Insights from Burundi and Italy."

Ms. Lynn Walsh, director of UPF's Office of the Family, opened the program and welcomed the two high-level speakers. The program followed the Chatham House Rule, by which the names of commenters and speakers are not provided without specific permission. This report summarizes the discussion.

The family serves as an irreplaceable resource for social development. From parents instilling moral agency and pro-social civic behavior to fostering improved education, mental and physical health, economic stability, and respectful gender equality, strong families form the foundation of societal stability essential for economic advancement. While family fragility has increased globally, national and religious values and cultures continue to foster behaviors and attitudes that support familial unity and function.

Sovereignty and Coercion in UN Negotiations

Negotiations at the United Nations over controversial issues often involve non-consensual language related to the family that contradicts national culture and values. Smaller, poorer countries frequently find their national sovereignty undermined as they face pressure to vote against their own national values and laws. During negotiations, these countries are told that if they do not support non-consensual language - even when it contradicts their national values - they will not receive financial aid. Such threats violate fundamental principles of the UN Charter. It was both alarming and sobering to hear that some very poor countries stand firm for the family, their sovereign rights, and their human dignity, choosing poverty over capitulation to coercion from larger nations.

Global Fertility Decline and Policy Responses

A second key issue discussed was global fertility decline, particularly acute in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Many countries have creatively implemented multiple financial programs and services to help couples overcome challenges such as childcare costs, career interruptions, and the high expense of raising children. While these varied programs are encouraging in their aim to enable couples to have the children they desire, they have shown only limited success in increasing birthrates.

Speakers argued that values and culture require attention, though these are difficult to engineer and achieve. They stressed the need for a cultural environment where motherhood and fatherhood are upheld as deeply rewarding and valuable. While significant emphasis has been placed on the value of women's work over recent decades, it is especially important that motherhood be recognized and honored. Work, while important, is not what proves most fulfilling in life, they pointed out. Rather, it is relationships, especially the foundational relationships of parent-child and husband-wife.