

At 60th UN Commission on the Status of Women UPF held a side-event

Lynn Walsh
March 24, 2016



New York, United States—As a side-event to a major U.N. event, UPF co-sponsored a program that tied together women's empowerment and the strength of the family.

During the 60th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which took place at U.N. Headquarters in New York City from March 14 to 24, UPF co-sponsored a UN side-event on March 24 together with the Permanent Missions of Honduras, The Gambia and Indonesia and the NGOs United Families International and the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society.

The title of the program was "Toward a Sustainable Life-style: Women Empowered and Families Strengthened." Although the event lasted three hours, the 120-capacity room remained packed, with people standing and sitting on the floor wherever space could be found.



Tageldin Hamad, secretary general of UPF, moderated the first session. The Honorable Fatou Mbye, deputy speaker of the National Assembly of The Gambia, offered the first opening remarks, noting that women bear a heavy weight on many levels in society, in The Gambia and around the world. She stated that when the family is weakened, the burdens of women grow even larger. She echoed the importance of the overall theme in saying, "If the family is strengthened, women are empowered."

Fanta Bai Secka, M.S.C., director of the Department of Social Welfare, The Gambia, was the next

speaker. Ms. Secka addressed the critical role of women and the family as the kernel from which all society grows. She explained that The Gambia promotes many programs to strengthen the family because, in her words, "The family develops society."



Although H.E. Mary Elizabeth Flores, ambassador and permanent representative of Honduras to the UN, was unable to attend, she sent a message which was read by David Romero. The brief statement conveyed that family strength and stability are important not only for women to flourish and gain opportunities in society; the cohesive family is essential for world peace itself.

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of The Gambia H.E. Mamadou Tangara spoke next on how the family was central to the culture of his country. The audience was struck by his positive modeling of these values when he said that even though he spends long hours representing his nation at the UN all week, on the weekends he makes sure he gives time to focus on his family. At the closing of this first session, Dr. Hamad recognized that Mrs. Yeon Ah Choi Moon, president of Women's Federation for World Peace International, an organization that is affiliated with UPF, was honoring the program with her presence.



The second session was moderated by Lynn Walsh, director of the Office of the Family, Universal Peace Federation. The first topic was "Ready or Not?: The Economic Consequences of Delayed Marriage for Women and Their Children," presented by Jason S. Carroll, Ph.D., professor, School of Family Life at Brigham Young University and research advisor, Panel of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Using a wealth of recent research, Dr. Carroll presented the overall negative impact on women and girls of delayed marriage, single parenthood, divorce and cohabitation. If we are serious about empowering women and providing girls the optimum opportunities for success, he said, we need to recognize that a committed and well-prepared marriage before childbirth offers the most advantages for mothers and their daughters. He concluded that "the family needs to move to the center of discussion of women's empowerment and societal development."

The next speaker, Timothy Rarick, Ph.D., professor, Department of Home and Family at Brigham Young University-Idaho, Advisory Board for United Families International, gave a dynamic presentation entitled "Fathers, Be Good to Your Daughters: The Remarkable Potential of the Father-Daughter Relationship." Incorporating both research and heart-warming video clips, Dr. Rarick discussed multiple ways in which daughters benefit from having their father actively involved in their lives: physically, emotionally, intellectually, academically, socially, spiritually and financially. The devastating toll of fatherlessness, unfortunately, can repeat into the next generation, and we are witnessing the negative impact in much of society. However, using some of his own experience as a father, Dr. Rarick reminded the audience of the tremendous benefit and joy that daughters and mothers gain from a committed father. In addition, he said, men are more likely to flourish and grow in the human capacities and precious life experiences of fatherhood.

Following this in-depth exploration of the father-daughter relationship, Ms. Nandi Bengu, chair of the Harlem Chapter of Women's Federation for World Peace USA, told a heart-wrenching story of her "father-hunger," growing up without her father in South Africa. She said her troubled teenage life radically turned around when her father came to her, expressing in tears his grievance and deep apologies that he had not been present in her life, and telling her sincerely how much he loved her. More than a few eyes moistened in hearing Ms. Bengu's testimony.

The final panelist was Melissa Moschella, Ph.D., assistant professor of Philosophy, The Catholic University of America and the author of *To Whom Do Children Belong? Parental Rights, Civic Education and Children's Autonomy*. Dr. Moschella addressed "Parental Rights and the Well-Being of Women and Children," articulating point by point why it is the primary right and responsibility of parents—not the state—to make decisions about the child. She stressed the dependence children have on the unique parent-child bond during the fragility of their development. She explained that any weakening through state or social interference, except in cases of abuse, undermines the parents' responsibility to provide the values and coherent upbringing that are essential for children's well-being. Dr. Moschella commented that mothers particularly suffer and are disempowered when their parental rights are diminished or disrespected. She referred to research indicating areas such as teen pregnancy and mental illness in which girls who lack a stable relationship with their parents become at risk. In conclusion, Dr. Moschella said that protecting parent-child connectedness and parental authority is necessary for substantially empowering mothers and the flourishing of women and girls.

Concluding remarks were given by Laura Bunker, president of United Families International. Mrs. Bunker succinctly summarized the main points of each of the speakers and then added a reflection on the event's theme. She concluded, "Women's policy and family policy do go hand in hand. When we strengthen families, we strengthen women—present and future. That is the only truly sustainable solution for generations to come."

