

Day of Families Observed in Oslo Norway

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Oslo, Norway: A forum on child development at the Diakonhjemmet University College

Oslo, Norway - For the fourth time, the UN International Day of Families was celebrated in Oslo, with a full auditorium at the Diakonhjemmet University College. The presentations and the discussions focused on the topic “What’s Best for the Child – A Search for a Good Framework for Children’s Development.”

In addition to the UPF moderator, three panelists commented on the topic from different perspectives.

Ms. Merete Agerbak-Jensen from UNICEF Norway, presented a recent UNICEF report titled “Child Well-being In Rich Countries.” One point worth reflecting over is the fact that a nation’s material wealth does not necessarily correspond to the children’s well-being. Children in Spain or Greece reported a higher level of well-being than children in Norway, even though these southern European nations face far more economic challenges. Material wealth and human happiness do not always go hand in hand.

Dr. Ola Didrik Saugstad, professor of pediatrics at the University of Oslo and pediatrician at the National Hospital in Norway, spoke on the technical possibilities and ethical limitations of biotechnology. Today the DNA of the unborn child can be known by a blood sample from the mother. Differences from the normal standard can be detected at an early age. If not properly governed, this may lead to a society of sorting out the unwanted ones. The topics surrogacy and donation of sperm and egg were discussed. The

technological possibilities are there, but are we using them in the interest of the child or the adults? For Dr. Saugstad, the moral compass is always having the child's interest at the center.

MP Öyvind Haabrekke, from the Christian Democratic Party and from the Standing Committee on Family Affairs in the Parliament, spoke about marriage and family as a frame for children's development. In the modern society, the government plays an increasingly large role in children's lives. The intention is good, but Mr Haabrekke raised the relevant question whether it is right that government takes on responsibilities that the families themselves are able to do.

In the panel discussion following the coffee break, there were several good questions and comments. One fundamental issue that was raised was why we do not emphasize preventive work more than repairing. Should we not give more to programs that support families as a way to avoid many social problems later? The political authorities have good intentions, and acute problems have to be dealt with. But a long-term policy of strengthening the family culture may provide good results.

Mr. Steinar Murud, Secretary General of UPF-Norway, asked in his concluding remarks, "Should the family adapt to the society, or should the society be formed around the family?" When we say the family is the fundamental unit of society, we should take the consequences of that, he said. The family should play a central role in society, supply values to the society, and function as a miniature model for the society.

Murud expressed a concern that if we do not maneuver well through the technological and political challenges, we may enter a quagmire that will be difficult to get out of.

However, the questions discussed are not easy questions and are even more difficult to answer. Even though we have good motives, the general consensus from the public was not to violate fundamental principles in our quest to build a better society and a peaceful world.