

15 May 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day of Families**

The fundamental nuclear component of any society is the family unit. It is sacrosanct to our survival as the human species as we know and live life today. However, in today's world the family is in transition and disintegrating and fragmenting under economic, political and other pressures. To underline the significance of the family, the United Nations General Assembly declared 15 May of each year as the day to celebrate the International Day of Families. Next year on this day, we will celebrate its tenth anniversary and the United Nations is taking an active role to promote comprehensive protection and support for the family unit at national and local levels. It is hoped that governments will use this occasion to reflect on the status of the family in their communities and the ways in which it can strengthen the family and provide protection and support to each family unit according to their need.

Recognizing the oneness of humanity and the family as its basic building block, the family remains the most effective institution to nurture the values of mutual respect, tolerance and spirituality in our future generations. So much of the welfare of any family lies in the hands of the mother who bears the children and is their teacher from the very moment of birth. It is therefore the mother who bears a major role in shaping the family and its values together with the father. This is why educational priorities for girls are so crucial. An educated mother will ensure that her children receive the protection, nurturing, care, guidance and encouragement for their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development. It is the father and mother within each family that can generate an environment to teach values of democracy, human rights, social responsibility, tolerance, peace and a work ethic.

Domestic violence is a debilitating feature in any family and community. Governments also have the responsibility to promote violence free families through enacting national legislation that criminalizes all form of domestic violence and to provide monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Preventive strategies through sensitizing the police, judiciary and religious leaders to the consequences of violence and obtaining their active participation in creating harmonious families and communities would go a long way towards improving the status of the family. Equal rights and opportunities, including rights to education, property rights and entrepreneurship opportunities for women, are also tools towards improving the status of the family through empowering women.

The family unit in many countries and cultures includes the grandparents and other extended family members. The senior members within a family unit have an added value by way of unconditional love, experience, support and providing moral and ethical standards, to enrich the

lives of the younger members in the family. Resourceful approaches are available to harness the positive role of the elderly in every community through enhancing their status wherever needed.

The media of every nation can play a decisive role in changing the entrenched negative patterns within a family and bring about a revolution in attitudes where equal partnership between men and women in a family is seen as the basis of creating united families.

The United Nations system continues to be a catalyst, to create awareness and promote the active participation of governments and civil society to focus on and address this issue. "The family is a nation in miniature" and therefore I urge all the decision makers and stakeholders in our communities and nations to work to ensure a family sustaining and friendly environment for a better world for our generations to come.