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Objectives and Expected Outcomes of the Meeting

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has enjoyed close cooperation with the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development over the years. In the past, the Doha Institute organized several expert group meetings on family-related issues as well as ageing and gender issues. An important outcome of our cooperation in the past was an expert group meeting which took place in Doha in 2009 under the theme: “Family Policy in a Changing World: Promoting Social Protection and Intergenerational Solidarity”.

It is important for us to build on the outcomes of previous conferences and meetings. Several recommendations from the meeting mentioned above focused on promoting intergenerational solidarity through building of partnerships and cooperation between youth and older persons’ organizations. The majority of recommendations, however, focused on older persons and related to the prevention of their social exclusion, ensuring their active participation in society and reducing the risks they face through various social protection mechanisms.

Now we are shifting our focus to the young people but still remain focused on a broader picture of quality intergenerational relations, the importance of supporting them and recommending how they can be shaped for the benefit of the old and young alike and a broader society at large.

When we look at current demographic and social trends, the importance of intergenerational relations comes into sharper focus. Among such changes rapid ageing and lower fertility rates are expected to result in higher dependency ratios of older generations on the younger generations. On the other hand, some research shows that financial resources in some countries are primarily transferred from the old to the young. Moreover, the revival of multi-generational family structures in parts of the western world can also be seen, in large measure as a coping mechanisms with the effects of current economic and financial crises.

The importance of quality intergenerational relations cannot be overstated. They contribute to social integration within families, communities and societies. Intergenerational relations are first shaped by the **family**, where children and young adults are taught how to interact in a broader world. Good quality relations within family shape other relations in life and contribute to individuals’ well-being throughout their

lives. Further, **educational institutions**, including schools but also community organizations, sports centers and other entities shape young individuals. Later, the **work place** may create conditions favourable to an exchange of ideas between generations, learning from one another and improving the workplace balance as well.

Governments have various policy instruments that can have a direct and indirect impact on the quality of dialogue between generations. Governments can enact specific policies, e.g. through the provision of social services or institutions, that benefit the quality of intergenerational relations. Such strategies impact families, educational institutions, communities, workplaces and societies at large.

Civil society and private sector influence intergenerational relations as well. Civil society is instrumental in carrying out community based programmes impacting intergenerational relations, similarly private sector policies in the work place may impact older and younger generations' interactions at work and influence their creativity, cooperation and productivity.

Governments have a difficult task of raising awareness of the importance of intergenerational communication and deal with challenges relating to demographic, social and economic changes affecting societies. Apparently, often Governments are not very effective at it. For instance, a recent Eurobarometer survey on solidarity between generations indicates that the EU citizens give a strong negative opinion on the performances of the government in promoting better understanding between the young and the old.

The objectives of this meeting are to provide policy recommendations to all stakeholders on areas of social policy and specific policies that support intergenerational dialogue and mutual understanding with a broader aim to benefit society as a whole and contribute to social integration and cohesion.

We have an urgent task to focus on youth as agents of intergenerational dialogue and understanding. We have been witnessing a movement for change throughout the world, where young people demand greater recognition, voice and participation. Governments, private sector, civil society, families and individuals should make efforts to help young people fully participate in their societies. Our meeting will attempt to make a contribution to this important task.

Our meeting will consist of seven sessions focusing on different issues affecting young people today. We will review several aspects of intergenerational relations, focus on issues relevant to different regions of the world and examine different frameworks for

building of understanding across generations. We also want to highlight lessons learnt from existing approaches and ways to enhance youth participation.

We would like each session to produce concrete recommendations for policy makers, as well as civil society and private sector, depending on the context of actions required. Our recommendations should stipulate what investments should be made in promoting intergeneration dialogue and advance youth development and social integration strategies. In particular, recommendations should focus on the role of existing frameworks for dialogue and mutual understanding across generations we identified: family, community, educational institutions and workplace.

I would like to emphasize that your deliberations and recommendations are very important for our work at the UN.

Firstly, the findings will be compiled into a report which will be accessible to all interested stakeholders.

Secondly our recommendations will serve as an input for the upcoming conference on youth and will be an important outcome of the observance of the International Year of Youth.

Thirdly, the outcomes of expert groups meeting are very useful to formulate issues and recommendations in the reports to the Commission for Social Development, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The findings of this meeting and its recommendations will constitute an important input for the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on the “Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family” and other reports and publications prepared by the Programme on the Family.

The recent resolution adopted by the Commission for Social Development of the UN requested the Commission to consider several themes to guide the preparations for the 20th anniversary of IYF in 2014.

They are:

- (a) poverty eradication: confronting family poverty and social exclusion
- (b) full employment and decent work: ensuring work-family balance
- (c) social integration: advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity

Our concern here is mostly the third theme relating to intergenerational solidarity and ways to achieve it through intergenerational dialogue. Other themes however, bear much relevance to the issues we will discuss today and tomorrow. Poverty and unemployment affect young people in disproportionate numbers. Without jobs, young people may find it difficult to establish families and may need to rely on their parents longer. Work-family balance seems more and more difficult to achieve impacting on intergenerational relations as well. In fact all issues we will discuss here are of much relevance to the broad themes guiding the upcoming activities of the UN in the area of family policy and overall family well-being.

In the upcoming reports on the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the IYF, we will present the issues of concern to families world wide and quote research that you present. We illustrate our reports with examples of effective policies and examples of good practices to show what works and what could be emanated in other countries and regions. Finally we also offer recommendations which then find their way to the resolutions and are recommended to the UN member states at large.

I am sure our deliberations will result in good recommendations and will find their way into concrete actions at national and international levels resulting in better policies supporting dialogue and mutual understanding across generations in many countries and regions.