

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES – 15 MAY

The International Day of Families, observed annually on 15 May, provides an opportunity to promote awareness of issues relating to families as basic units of society, as well as, to promote appropriate action.

Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 47/237 of 20 September 1993, the annual observance of the International Day of Families reflects the importance that the international community attaches to families as basic units of societies as well as its concern regarding their situation around the world.

2008 is the 14th Anniversary of the International Day of Families.

FAMILIES

There is no single view or universal consensus on what makes up a family. Families are far too diverse and dynamic to be pigeon-holed or strictly defined. Yet in any culture, the family provides a natural framework in which individuals – and especially children -- can receive the emotional, financial and material nourishment and support that is indispensable to their development.

Families play a crucial role in society. A strong family structure is conducive to the well-being of its members and of society at large. It is within the family that children can learn positive values that will guide them for the rest of their lives, and it is within the family that people can learn key lessons about equality, tolerance and shared responsibility.

While families are engines of development, they are also its beneficiaries. Where development is slow or absent, a family's ability to meet the needs of its members will be impaired. And where development is undermined by conflict, and instability prevails, families are undermined as well, robbing societies of an essential building block for peace and prosperity.

OBJECTIVES OF INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES

Governments, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, religious groups and individuals and the media can respond with their respective observances of the Day to promote a better understanding of the functions, problems, strengths and needs of families. This day provides a platform to

- Recognise families as the basic social units in society;
- Respect the diverse forms of families;
- Recognise the basic rights of all family members, regardless of their status within families;
- Increase awareness of family issues among all sectors of society
- Stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families;
- Recognise the need to foster equality and equity between men and women.

THE RIGHTS OF FAMILIES AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Central to social development is the advancement of human rights within the family which include the equal rights and responsibilities of individual members of families, gender equality, the role of the males and protection and development of children.

Numerous human rights documents recognise the family as the basic unit of society and its entitlement to protection and support by society and the State. This is reflected in provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in the Declaration and Program of Action of the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995.

The family's welfare, its ability to fulfil basic societal functions and its support by the society and the State are major elements in achieving a robust and developed nation. The explicit articulation of the rights, functions and responsibilities of families can be a source of inspiration and a point of reference for efforts to support families and create family-friendly societies.

Issues related to infants and children attract the closest attention from Governments and organisations in the context of the relationship between human rights and families. In this regard, high priority is attached to the family's responsibility for caring for the child. Families, as major educational channels in contemporary society, are the principal means for the transmission of values, culture, attitudes and patterns of behavior. Attitudes toward one's society or culture or toward other social groups are profoundly imprinted during childhood within the family and circle. They serve as communicators and transmitters as well as intermediaries between formal and other institutions of informal education.

THEME 2008 - "FATHERS AND FAMILIES – RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES"

The theme for the 2008 observance is "Fathers and Families: Responsibilities and Challenges", which emphasises the role of the father in the family and the responsibilities and special challenges that accompany it.

Fathers have an important, constructive role to play in families. It is important to foster a positive environment for fatherhood, both within families and within society, and to construct and implement father-friendly social and family policies, assisting fathers to meet the many challenges of fatherhood.