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Statement submitted by Fundación Contemporánea, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Fundación Contemporánea submits the present document on the occasion of the fifty-third session of the Commission for Social Development. Fundación Contemporánea is an institution that has been working for 22 years on the development of leaders in Argentina, with a strong focus on the social and educational components. One of the areas to which the institution is specifically devoted is the study and analysis of public policies that affect the family. Fundación Contemporánea obtained special consultative status in 2014.

Relevance of the family

The family is the first natural institution, subject to its own originary rights. The family precedes the existence of the State, which is why it constitutes the basic and fundamental nucleus of society. This implies that the family has an original contribution to offer to the community and that the State must protect and endorse its essential functions.

International instruments reaffirm the value of the family by incorporating it in the core body of human rights: both the American Convention on Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights state that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Families are agents of development. They play a crucial role in social development. The primary responsibilities of educating and socializing children rest upon them, as do those of imprinting the values of citizenship and the sense of belonging to a society. It is within the family and the community that individuals first experience social integration and that the social norms that all individuals acquire during childhood and youth are transmitted. The stability and cohesiveness of communities and societies are also mostly based on the strength of the family.

Focusing on the family offers a broad solution with a human perspective on the matter of development, whereas it is generally approached from a perspective influenced by sectoral policies or social groups. That is why policies oriented towards the family achieve their maximum efficacy when they treat it as a unit and conceive its dynamics as a whole, instead of focusing on the particular needs of its members.

Despite their importance, families find it increasingly hard to achieve those multiple functions and to bear all those responsibilities. Families are seldom the focus of key political initiatives, despite certain initiatives that are emerging at different levels.

In the present document, we address certain vulnerabilities of the family in Argentina, presenting some brief considerations on the matter. Before immersing ourselves into that issue, however, it is important to contextualize these vulnerabilities by reviewing a series of changes that have affected family dynamics in a very direct manner.

Family situation

When we talk about family-oriented policies, we cannot ignore some substantial changes that have modified family patterns and dynamics (Rossel, 2013), namely:

- (a) The demographic transition;
- (b) The modification of marriage and divorce patterns;
- (c) The incorporation of a very large number of women into the labour market;
- (d) Economic conditions.

The demographic transition refers to the process by which total fertility has greatly declined, to an increase in life expectancy and to a decrease in mortality. In Argentina, the fertility rate decreased from 5.3 children in 1914 to 2.2 children in 2010. In parallel, life expectancy at birth increased from 48.5 years in 1914 to 73.8 years in 2010. These demographic trends have had clear consequences: (a) the ageing of the population; (b) a decrease in the impact of the population aged between 0 and 14 years (the future economically active population); and (c) an increase in the impact of the population aged 65 and over (the dependent population). It should thus be noted that, in Argentina, the index of potential dependency fell from 65.1 in 1991 to 55.5 in 2010. However, if the indicator is disaggregated by age group, the index of potential dependency increased in the group of older adults, from 14.6 in 1991 to 15.9 in 2010.

With regard to marriage and divorce trends, marriages decreased from 82 per cent in 1991 to 61 per cent of all unions in 2010, while consensual unions increased from 18 to 39 per cent in the same period. Family fragmentation and the weakening of marital ties have exposed women and children to a greater degree of vulnerability. Thus, incomplete (single-parent) households are typically headed by women: in 2010, 82 per cent of single parents in Argentina were women. This inevitably leads a large group of women to be the breadwinners of their families and to endeavour to reconcile economic, family and personal responsibilities.

Another factor that cannot be ignored is the massive incorporation of women into the labour market. In Argentina, the employment rate of women has increased considerably in the past 10 years, in comparison to the employment rate of men, which has been virtually stable. When we disaggregate the data, nonetheless, we note that it is specifically women with children who have joined the labour market in very large numbers. The increase in the participation of women in the labour force has led to changes inside households: in absolute terms, the number of women who are heads of households increased by 32 per cent between 2001 and 2010.

Vulnerabilities: some observations

In Argentina, statistical data show that families with children are suffering certain social inequalities more acutely than those without. Social development policies cannot ignore this reality.

Thus, the basic needs of 19.3 per cent of households with children are not met, compared with 3.8 per cent of households without children. Similarly, 16 per cent of households with children live in poor housing conditions, compared with 7 per cent of households without children, and 13.7 per cent of households with children live

in crowded conditions, compared with 0.8 per cent of households without children. In total, 17.5 per cent of households with children live in a situation of irregular housing tenure, compared with 7.6 per cent of households without children. Similar differences exist in relation to access to public utilities: 17.6 per cent of households with children do not have access to safe drinking water, 72.2 per cent to energy and 36.8 per cent to gas, while 41.6 per cent are not connected to sewers.

With regard to the labour market, many mothers in the paid workforce have precarious occupations and do not benefit from social security. In total, 40.4 per cent of mothers are in this situation, compared with 21.7 per cent of women without children. With regard to health, 65.3 per cent of mothers paid for health insurance in 2012 (not public). Social inequalities are also evident in this matter: while 44 per cent of mothers in households in the bottom 30 per cent of the income range paid for health insurance, 95.6 per cent those who lived in households in the top 30 per cent paid for such insurance. Behind each of these indicators lies a complex reality, which opens up a host of pressing and interrelated problems.

Let us take as an example poor housing and its link with the child's educational achievements. Some studies put forward the idea that housing conditions have an impact on the child's educational achievements. This means that, other factors being equal, the higher the quality of building materials, water supply, sanitation and hygiene, the better the socialization that takes place at home, and the greater the skills to complement the work being done by the schools (Kaztman, 2011).

Finally, there is robust evidence showing that the capabilities of parents have important implications for the human capital of their children, as well as in the level of development that those may achieve during their adult lives. In terms of schooling, for example, some studies suggest that the main obstacles to the achievement of adequate levels of schooling originate in the home, including in the form of high opportunity costs linked to how household members use their time and the lack of access to credit or of opportunities for income generation.

A focus on families for policy formulation that comprehensively addresses the intergenerational problems could boost sustainable development initiatives. Empowered and functional families are a synonym of development promotion.
