

Fiddler on the U.N. Roof



Richard Wilkins Aids a Sea Change at Habitat II

by Charles D. Cranney, Associate Editor

TEVYE

A fiddler on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But in our little village . . .
you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof,
trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck.'

In April 1996 Professor Richard Wilkins, sporting a full, bushy beard, had just begun playing Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* at the local Hale Theater. Of course his wife, Melany, was playing Golde. This was a special theater season for both of them, marking the 25th anniversary of when they played these roles as seniors in high school. The song “Do You Love Me?” had never had more meaning to them than at this time.

TEVYE
Then you love me.

GOLDE
I suppose I do.

TEVYE
And I suppose I love you, too.

BOTH
It doesn't mean a thing, but even so,
after 25 years, it's nice to know.

TEVYE
On the other hand . . .

"Boy, I didn't want to go," said Wilkins. "I thought it was useless. It was like slogging through molasses. I did not want to miss the last two weeks of *Fiddler*, and I *did not* want to miss closing night. I'd planned this for so long. I tried every-

to fly to Istanbul and to let his understudy finish up as Tevye.

What occurred after that was what Wilkins has described as "the legal equivalent to the parting of the Red Sea."

"Professionally, it was the most interesting thing I had done. On a spiritual level it was almost the most profound thing I've witnessed. I felt the hand of the Lord moving people from all over the world in ways that were as real as if he had been there in a pillar of smoke and fire."

So, registering as a representative of BYU's David M. Kennedy International Center and the Law School in preparation for the conference, Professor Wilkins and student Bradley Roylance prepared a paper to present at an NGO (nongovernment organization) seminar. The paper, entitled "The Impact of U.N. Conference Declarations on International and Domestic Law," warned:

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U.N. conference documents, although not technically binding upon participating nations, nevertheless are an important influence in shaping and solidifying the normative concepts of international law. The conference documents, moreover, may have significant impact upon the domestic policy of signatory nations even without formal enforcement mechanisms. Great care, therefore, is warranted in

crafting the precise language incorporated into a formal conference declaration.²

thing in the world to back out. But I just had this feeling that said, 'Go, go, go.'"

For eight months Wilkins had planned a grand party after closing night—June 10, 1996—and had invited longtime friends to commemorate and celebrate. He also planned to have 25 red roses delivered to his wife.

Then he received a call.

Susan Roylance, president of United Families International, asked Wilkins if he could attend Habitat II in Istanbul. This summary U.N. conference, with 25,000 participants, would finalize a seminal legal document, setting an international framework and vision for many years to come. Roylance was concerned because few at the conference seemed to represent traditional family values. And the other side had a well-oiled lobbying machine, mainly from the U.S., that had been extremely influential at the five forerunner conferences to Habitat II. One such was the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, where language in support of same-sex marriages and abortion on demand was easily injected into the Habitat draft.

Wilkins, weary from losing family-value battles on the local front, wasn't inclined to accept Roylance's offer. Besides, this theater season was a special time with his wife and family. His daughter, Claire, acted as the errant Chava in *Fiddler*. Brinton was the rabbi's son, and Rex played a young child. The Wilkins' oldest daughter, Brooke, was the house manager.

HODEL
How can I hope to make you
understand why I do . . . what I do?
Why I must travel to a distant land
Far from the home I love.

With continual encouragement from Roylance, Wilkins decided to follow his feeling, and he made hasty arrangements

Wilkins also drafted several proposed amendments to the Habitat document.

The NGO forum was composed of booths and workshops put on by thousands of nongovernmental entities—"an often raucous marketplace of competing views"—wishing to influence the outcome of the U.N. conference.

"I had merely intended to deliver that paper, do what I could to further the work of United Families International, and watch further social deterioration—at which point I would come back and write

a scholarly paper criticizing the continuing trend,” said Wilkins.

Checking into the Ulubat Hotel (“hardly the epitome of luxury accommodations”), Wilkins looked to see where and when he would be presenting his paper. To his delight and surprise, he was given the largest room with a full cadre of translators on the NGO conference’s second day.

There were hundreds of these types of papers given at Habitat II, and the chance of having a significant international audience with translation services was small.

“There were all kinds of rooms in which you could give your presentation,” said Wilkins, “some of them about the size of closets. There were very few big rooms that would seat several hundred people with full panels of interpreters. Since there were hundreds and hundreds of presentations given during the three weeks, my placement was very unusual. After inquiry, I learned the scheduler thought I was from the *John F. Kennedy School* at Harvard—not the *David M. Kennedy Center* at BYU.”

The room was packed for his presentation and included such distinguished guests as the chief justice from India, a member of the House of Lords, prime ministers from African nations, and many Islamic leaders. Some requested copies of his paper, which had started a rumble at the conference, and many formal and informal discussions ensued.

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TEVYE

... and tear out my beard.

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Even Wilkins’ beard seemed to help.

Preparing for the conference, Wilkins was in a bit of a dilemma with his bushy *Fiddler* beard. Brigham Young University’s dress code currently mandates that no beards are to be worn by faculty, staff, or students. Wilkins’ face had become tanned in the spring sun, and shaving off his Tevye beard would “make me look like a raccoon.” So he decided to neatly trim it instead.

“I didn’t look like a normal person from BYU. I did look like someone who might have been from Harvard University.” Because he was in an Islamic country and was talking to many Islamic leaders, Wilkins was convinced in a very real way that the fact he had a beard gave him “a lot more credibility with people who otherwise wouldn’t have listened to this white-shirted, clean-shaven American.”

While Wilkins’ discussions were developing his affinity with like-minded associates, others in support of the traditional family were having similar experiences. For example, the talented Steven and Claudia Goodman family³ (with nine of their 12 children) gave many performances of a family-values concert written for them by LDS composer Kenneth Cope. (One was at a large university theater, one at the main public park in Istanbul, and another at the opening ceremonies of a high-level conference plenary session.) The *Turkish Daily News* front-page headline announced, “Goodman Family Outdoes U.N. Habitat Conference.” One song, “Remember,”⁴ truly moved the audiences:

*Who will raise their voice for the family?
Who’ll defend the rights of our liberty?
Come preserve your own
In the strength of God and home.
All who will rejoice in this privilege
Let them now maintain freedom’s heritage.
Come with fervent zeal;
Join us on the battlefield!*

*Fathers, join together in your brotherhood.
Mothers, stand united in your sisterhood.
Rally ’round the cause.
Come before the battle’s lost.*

*Now the nations stray forgetful,
Heedless to the past.
If we fail to plant the standard,
How can the family last?
Who’ll receive this charge?
Come and show a valiant heart!*

*Remember our homes—the safeguard of peace.
Remember the children who look to you
to keep tomorrow free.
Remember God, remember His love.
He calls to us “Remember.”*

*He cries to us,
He pleads with us,
“Remember,
Remember,
Remember.”*

The Goodman family was important, according to Roylance, because “people need to do more than just hear about families. They need to see one—and it helps if it is a large, functioning family like the Goodmans.”

Also, United Families manned a booth 10 hours a day to distribute pro-family materials. Others gave workshops. Wilkins and United Families colleagues lobbied for changes in the Habitat draft. Even so, “things still did not look too bright by the end of the first week,” said Wilkins.

But things were starting to change. On June 6, Johnson N. Mwaura, an elders quorum president from Nairobi, stopped by the United Families booth when it was unmanned. A member of a selection committee that would choose a mere 10 NGO voices to address the actual delegates drafting the Habitat agenda, Mwaura later returned and urged the group to nominate someone to speak in favor of the family. The person at the booth nominated Wilkins, and Mwaura rushed to submit his name moments before the deadline.

“No one in our group even knew about the opportunity before Brother Mwaura appeared,” said Wilkins. “Non-governmental representatives had *never* addressed an official U.N. body before.” But on hearing of his nomination, Wilkins said, “I *knew* that I would be selected to speak.” He also sensed that the next few days would be most difficult.

The selection process was supposed to consist of a brief “tryout” presentation. Arriving at 10 a.m. on the designated morning, Wilkins had prepared a two-minute presentation about the impact of U.N. declarations on the disintegration of the family. The panel of judges had barely begun their work when a representative of the Women’s Caucus, a feminist organization headed by Bella Abzug, appeared, first declaring that the selection process was invalid. Then the representative demanded that eight of the 10 speakers should be from the Women’s Caucus.

"Thereupon ensued one of the most bitter (and irrational) rhetorical battles I have ever witnessed," said Wilkins.

The Women's Caucus continued the battle for three hours, saying such things as "No man has the right to evaluate what a woman has to say" and "Rules should never get in the way of justice."

"When other NGOs protested that the claimed right to eight speakers would preclude presentation of other viewpoints, the Women's Caucus representative retorted that the objection was irrelevant because the caucus' outlook was more important than other possible opinions."

After a long three hours, Wilkins had had enough. Finally grabbing the attention of the raucous group, he said:

I have been a law professor for 12 years, and never have I heard arguments that have such little appeal to either the rule of law or a sense of justice. There are limited speaking slots available, and the procedures to select a broad range of speakers have been in place and approved for some time. Now the Women's Caucus appears and claims that, because of its size and power, it is entitled to disregard those rules. This is quite like a litigant coming into a courtroom and declaring that, because of her wealth and prestige, she is entitled to her own brand of justice. Law and justice should treat everyone equally and fairly. It is time to get on with the established selection process.

After a bit more shouting, the irate Women's Caucus representative left, and, finally, the tryouts continued late into the evening.

Arriving at his hotel room at midnight, Wilkins received a message that he was one of 10 chosen and that his presentation should be 10 minutes long. At an organizational meeting the next day, he arrived to find the Women's Caucus war still raging.

The 10 speakers were informed that because there was some question about the selection process being fair, other speakers might be added. After disclosing their topics (duly noted by the Women's Caucus rep), Wilkins and the other speakers went to various computers to work on their remarks. A group of women gathered uncomfortably close to Wilkins, making derisive remarks such as "Can you believe that someone is actually speaking about families, the most oppressive unit of society and the root of every war since

agency for a kidney stone), the only text he had before him was "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," an LDS Church declaration by the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles (see page 17). "My constant prayer," said Wilkins, "was that the message of that proclamation would touch some hearts."

The next morning, at the session where Wilkins was to speak, the committee chair announced that a "few" additional presenters had been added to the roster. ("Eight representatives from the Women's Caucus, to be

"We've ignored the dramatic impact that these documents can and are having. I think it's clear that the Beijing platform has dramatically affected implementation of U.S. federal regulations in areas like abortion access."

the beginning of time?" and "Can you believe that someone is actually opposing homosexual marriages? We have reached the point in our civilization where there should be no discrimination." Two hours later, the representative next to Wilkins was summarily dismissed and informed that a representative from the Women's Caucus would take her place.

That evening, as Wilkins continued work on his address, "in the midst of extremely adverse circumstances" (which included his roommate's medical emer-

exact," said Wilkins.) The chair continued to announce that only six minutes per speaker would be allowed and that it was likely they wouldn't be able to hear from everybody. Wilkins was scheduled as the second to the last speaker, right after the eight additional presentations. "I would not be cut but rather squeezed out," said Wilkins.

Predictably, the eight speakers took much longer than six minutes, repeatedly discussing, according to Wilkins, how "the world's housing problems would disappear if women made most of the important

The Family

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

The First Presidency
and Council of
the Twelve Apostles
of The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize

his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

HUSBAND AND WIFE have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah. It was published in the Ensign, November 1994, page 102.

decisions about resource allocation, if alternative forms of sexual partnerships were recognized, and if women had ready access to pregnancy termination and government-sponsored day care."

Then the floor was given to Bella Abzug, the founder of the Women's Caucus, who spent 10 minutes extolling the virtues of the Women's Caucus.

"I sat back in my chair, astounded at the breadth of the Women's Caucus' total domination," said Wilkins.

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TEVYE

If you spit in the air, it lands in your face.

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Yet the domination had become so overt (including vile language several times) that an Algerian delegate formally protested: "Mr. Chairman, we were to hear a variety of views from NGOs this morning, but this has been turned into a seminar on radical lesbian feminism. I want to know if other views are being foreclosed." With the motion being quickly seconded by the Holy See (from the Vatican), the chairman opened the floor, resulting in a flood of objections and charges of corruption.

Trying to assure the delegates that he wasn't corrupt, the chairman allowed Wilkins to deliver "a severely adumbrated version" of his speech for about four minutes. Walking to the podium, Wilkins was verbally hissed by some.

The speech (see page 20)⁶ was given the same day—June 10, 1996—that was closing night for *Fiddler on the Roof* back home. The plea for tradition came through clearly.

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TEVYE

It isn't easy. You may ask, why do we stay up here [on the roof] if it's so dangerous? We stay because [this] is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word—tradition!

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After Wilkins' talk, several delegates from developing nations expressed their thanks, many surprised that an American law professor would defend such a traditional position. Over the next three days, an overwhelming sea change occurred. A group from Islamic nations (many of whom had talked to Wilkins earlier) drafted a document demanding support for traditional values, using such statements as "the family is the nucleus of . . . society" and "the family starts with a man and a woman bonded according to social and religious norms." Many of the other developing countries, "the G-77," as they are known, followed suit and demanded radical changes to the Habitat draft.

"What had looked, from the beginning, like another total victory for the far left feminist agenda was—instead—almost a total defeat," said Wilkins.

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FRUMA-SARAH

Have you no consideration for a woman's feelings?

CHORUS

Woman's feelings?

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Frustrated, one prominent Women's Caucus leader suggested to Wilkins that he was a "man" and could "never understand." She even went so far as to say that people like Wilkins "hardly deserved to live."

But the Habitat draft did change.

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MOTEL

Wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles . . .

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"If anyone would have told me, a mere month before, that an important international conference would reaffirm the centrality of the family, reject homosexual unions, and retreat significantly from former worldwide commitments to abortion, I would have called that person either an

inexperienced optimist or a fool," said Wilkins. In all, more than 20 explicit references to abortion were deleted. But perhaps the greatest coup was the final draft's definition of marriage, recognizing that marriage involves spouses who are husband and wife.

"I was surprised at how much impact a few dissenting voices had," said Wilkins. "Bella Abzug insisted that there was this massive, well-organized, well-funded organization behind me. All I had was a plane ticket that the Law School had purchased, a small travel advance, and my MasterCard."

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MENDEL

Is there a proper blessing for the [U.N.]?

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So what is Wilkins' view of the U.N. now? "Voices supporting traditional values were eventually heard and—once heard—had significant impact on the final version of the Habitat agenda," said Wilkins. But, though "ideological tyranny does not always prevail," the tyrants are still there. "The current operations of the U.N., dominated as they are by a decidedly liberal and incredibly powerful Women's Caucus that is (at least apparently) directed by a single person, present the same danger of tyranny."

When asked why those in the United States heard little about the conference, Wilkins summarized it in two words: presidential election. Wilkins asserts that the president downplayed Habitat II because much of the agenda the U.S. delegates were pushing there was in direct opposition to the president's domestic position, something the electorate might not have appreciated.

"The U.N. affords political leaders the opportunity to say one thing and do another," says Wilkins. And he documents in his academic writings some ways that the president has used U.N. declarations and agendas to promote a non-legislatively approved ideology.

"People everywhere need to be aware of the role the U.N. is having in the United

States and the world. We've ignored the dramatic impact that these documents can and are having. I think it's clear that the Beijing platform has dramatically affected implementation of U.S. federal regulations in areas like abortion access."

The new international flavor of Wilkins' academic pursuits has given him renewed hope about slowing the erosion

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TEVYE

Because of our traditions everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.

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2. The information for this article came from (1) an interview with Professor Wilkins; (2) "Bias, Error, and Duplicity: The United Nations and Domestic Law," by Richard Wilkins; (3) "Background Report and Outcome on the U.N. Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)," by Bradley N. Roylance and Jennifer A. Hogge; (4) "The Impact of U.N. Conference Declarations on International and Domestic Law," by Richard Wilkins; and

After Wilkins' talk, several delegates from developing nations expressed their thanks, many surprised that an American law professor would defend such a traditional position.

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of values internationally. "Frankly, we may have lost the battle in the United States," says Wilkins, "but that battle is not at all lost out in the world at large. If we just slow down the erosion, it will provide a window of opportunity for the gospel to be preached." It is the gospel, Wilkins believes, "that is the only thing that will ultimately change all of this anyway."

Continuing his academic quest, Wilkins plans on attending the first of the U.N.'s Habitat-implementation conferences in Nairobi later this year.

Wilkins believes that it is hard to judge how valuable his role was at Habitat II. There were many who contributed to its success. He does feel grateful, however, for being able to "scratch out a pleasant, simple tune" as a fiddler on the U.N. roof.

Notes

1. All quotes from the play can be found in "Fiddler on the Roof," in *Great Musicals of the American Theatre*, ed. Stanley Richards, vol. 1 (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Company, 1973).

(5) Executive Summary: The Transformation of the Habitat II Agenda," by Richard Wilkins.

3. Not long after they returned from Istanbul, three of the Goodman children were killed in a tragic automobile accident.

4. You can hear this song on the worldwide web at <http://advance.byu.edu/law/istanbul.html>.

5. As reported by Susan Whitney, "Utah Clan Headed to Turkey to Show Off Traditional Family," *Deseret News*, 6 June 1996, A-20.

6. An audio recording of Professor Wilkins' address to the U.N. delegates can be heard at <http://advance.byu.edu/law/istanbul.html>.

REMARKS OF
Richard G. Wilkins

Mr. Chairman, honorable delegates, as a professor of law at Brigham Young University and representative of the Caucus for Stable Communities, it is an honor to address international law and the family.

International law deals with the vital issues that arise as women, men, and children live together in national and international communities. The traditional family is the necessary foundation for these larger communities because it is the sanctuary where women and men learn cooperation, sacrifice, love, and mutual support; it is the training ground where children learn the public virtues of responsibility, work, fair play, and social interdependence.

International law and the family, therefore, are inextricably linked. Disregarding this link places both the law and families in peril. Dialogue between family-based nongovernmental organizations and governmental organs, however, can reduce this risk. That cooperation, furthermore, is essential as the regulatory role of U.N. conferences expands.

For example, the Habitat agenda could reshape the contours of international law. Such conference documents can be seen as restatements of binding customary international law. Conference documents can also

significantly alter local law, both through voluntary compliance and by directing the development of domestic law. These documents, finally, address topics—such as housing—that previously were left to local decision makers.

This expansion in the role of conference documents raises serious questions related not only to their substantive content but to the democratic process by which the documents are crafted. As a lawyer and a family advocate, these issues are troubling.

There is substantial distance between those drafting and implementing a conference document and those enjoying the benefits or bearing the burdens of that drafting and implementation. In a local arena, affected families have relatively easy access to the decision makers who can provide redress. Not so on the international front, where many are readily confused by complex international procedure.

Unless this gap between international government and the family is closed, international government is in danger of losing touch with—and perhaps doing substantial harm to—its citizens.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) may help fill this gap. The many views put forward by NGOs and their associated caucuses reduce the risk of regulatory error—to the substantial benefit of both international law and citizens living under that law. For this process to work, however, all voices must be heard. There is, moreover, one important voice that—at least in my professional legal opinion—has not been given adequate attention in the international lawmaking process: the voice of the traditional family.

There is a fundamental connection between the effectiveness of the international—indeed, any—legal system and the reinforcement of strong, stable families. This conference has spent substantial time debating the



Video Capture

U.N. HABITAT FOR HUMANITY
JUNE 10, 1996
ISTANBUL, TURKEY

infrastructure essential for sustainable communities. Similar close attention must be paid to what I would call “*intrastructure*.” This *intrastructure* is built from the fundamental values fostered by strong families.

Family-centered advocacy groups can work positively with government to facilitate sustainable communities. One of the more controversial issues in the debate over the Habitat agenda is the question of teenage reproductive health education and services. Unplanned teenage pregnancies obviously burden community sustainability. Although some pragmatically turn to contraception and abortion, there are family-centered government initiatives that not only address this serious problem but recognize the sanctity of life.

As one example, family advocacy groups in the United States persuaded Congress to authorize a family-based sexual abstinence approach to teenage pregnancy prevention. The enabling legislation specifically recognized that

The family is the basic social unit in which the values and attitudes of adolescents concerning sexuality and pregnancy are formed.

A program set up by Northwest Family Services included facilitating discussions between parents and children on human sexuality, the advantages of premarital abstinence, and the medical facts of fetal development. A five-year statistical analysis of the program, conducted by Dr. Stan Weed of the Institute for Research and Evaluation, found significant improvements in parent-child communication and, even more important, a substantial decrease in teenage pregnancy.

Cooperation between family-oriented NGOs and those implementing conference documents can produce these kinds of positive results and also help avoid government interventions that destabilize families and ultimately the community itself.

For example, a well-intentioned international mandate to provide adequate housing for women and children, prompted by the deplorable conditions facing abandoned women and children, may—in a perverse twist—exacerbate rather than resolve the very problem it addresses. Such a program, unless draped and administered with the needs, role, and function of the family in mind, may encourage other men to abandon their wives and children to the state, thereby not only undermining the family but rendering the goal of a sustainable community increasingly difficult.

The issues before this conference are complex. Their proper resolution will be greatly aided by careful attention to the views and perspectives of the nongovernmental sector. In that process, I urge you not to forget the most basic and fundamental community of all: the family.

