

Remarks of Archbishop Francis Chullikatt
“Secure human development: marriage, family, community”
Side event, 7 April 2011, 1:15 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.
Conference Room 6

Mr. Minnery, Senior Vice-President of the Focus on the Family,
Excellencies,
Dear Panelists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I would like to thank the Permanent Missions of Honduras and Malta for *co-sponsoring* this side event, along with the Observer Mission of the Holy See. I wish to recognize also in a special way the Deputy Ambassadors of their respective countries.

I wish also to thank Focus on the Family, the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, and Concerned Women for America for their *hosting* this important event and for providing our distinguished panel of experts.

The theme of the Commission on Population and Development next week is “Fertility, reproductive health, and development.” For this reason, it is most fitting that the title of our side event today is on “Secure human development: marriage, family, and community.”

I say this because, for integral human development to take place, we must put people first. We must respect the inherent dignity of each and every person, and we must recognize that the true measure of authentic development in any society is how much it protects, respects and promotes all human life including the unborn, the disabled, the elderly, and all who are suffering.

It is important that our side event today focuses on three interrelated aspects of human life, namely: marriage, the family, and the community. This is a natural development that begins with marriage.

Marriage is an institution born “from the human act by which the man and woman mutually surrender themselves to each other” (*Gaudium et spes*, 48), and is founded on the very nature of that conjugal love which, as a total and exclusive gift of person to person, entails a definitive commitment expressed by mutual, irrevocable and public consent. No power can abolish the natural right to marriage or modify its traits and purpose. Marriage, in fact, is endowed with its own proper, innate and permanent characteristics.

In every culture there exists a certain sense of the dignity of the marriage union. Tragically this is not evident everywhere with the same clarity and is even under attack in some societies. Nonetheless, the dignity of marriage must be respected in its specific characteristics and must be safeguarded against any attempt to undermine it.

In its objective truth, the marriage of man and woman is ordered to the procreation and education of children. The marriage union gives fullness of life to that sincere gift of self, the fruit of which is children, who in turn are a gift for the parents, for the whole family, and for all of society.

The family founded on marriage is truly the sanctuary of life, “the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth” (*Centesimus Annus*, 39). *The role of the family in promoting and building the culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable.*

Turning to the theme of the upcoming session of the Commission on Population and Development, we must remember that the answer to questions connected with population growth must be sought in respect both of sexual morals and of social ethics, promoting greater justice and authentic solidarity, so that dignity is given to human life in all circumstances, starting with economic, social, religious and cultural conditions.

In this regard, the intervention of public authorities within the limits of their competence to provide information and enact suitable measures in the area of demographics, must be made in a way that *fully* respects all persons and the freedom of the couple. For this reason, international programmes of economic assistance aimed at financing campaigns of sterilization and contraception, as well as the subordination of economic assistance to such campaigns, are affronts to the dignity of the person, the family, and the human community.

We must remember that morally responsible openness to life represents a rich social and economic resource. We must recall that populous nations have been able to emerge from poverty thanks not least to the size of their population and the talents of their people.

We know that today some formerly prosperous nations are presently passing through a phase of uncertainty and in some cases decline because of their falling birth rates, which has become a crucial problem for highly affluent societies. The decline in births, falling at times beneath the so-called “replacement level”, also puts a strain on social welfare systems, increases their cost, eats into savings and hence the financial resources needed for investment, reduces the availability of qualified laborers, and narrows the “brain pool” upon which nations can draw for their needs. What’s more, smaller families run the risk of impoverishing social relations and failing to ensure effective forms of solidarity (*Caritas in veritate*, 44).

For this reason it is becoming a social and even economic necessity once more to hold up to future generations *the beauty of marriage and the family, and the fact that these institutions correspond to the deepest needs and dignity of the person*. In view of this, States are called to enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family founded on marriage, the primary vital cell of society, and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character (*ibid.*, 44).

It is not surprising that the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* explicitly states that “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State” (art. 16, 3) and that the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* further states that “The right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognized” (art. 23, 2). Legal protection of family and recognition of marriage and the family are fundamentals that are non-negotiable and must always be upheld by the State.

It is certainly important for the international community to continue to reflect on the relationship between population and development. In this context, States must always remember that people are an asset, not a liability. The more States recognize this, the more they will be able to put in place programmes and policies that really and truly advance the well being of all members of the human community, and thus contribute to integral human development.

Thank you for the attention.