

DIFI Calls for Policy Changes Regarding Arab Family Unit

Executive Director highlights continued threat to regional families at UN

Doha, 22 February, 2014: The Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), Executive Director, Noor Al Jehani, called for policy changes in the Arab world in order to strengthen rather than undermine the family unit.

Speaking during the recent 52nd session of the United Nations (UN) Commission for Social Development at the UN Head Quarters in New York, the Executive Director highlighted the need for regional family centred policies. Stating that due to the 'Arab Spring' the region is currently witnessing unprecedented levels of conflict and unrest that continue to threaten the stability of families and society overall.

"Although the family is confirmed as the basic unit of society in most constitutions in the Arab world, and the family's strength, stability and commitment to its individual members is considered the foundation of national and regional development trajectories - the reality is far removed from this ideal," said Noor Al Jehani. "Across the region, the family unit has not been an essential component in the policy development as individuals remain the focus of national strategies. Hence, across the region explicit family policies are rare and do not meet international standards, like maternity leave."

Noor went on to address the economic impact of family breakdowns saying, "Failing to support and protect family relationships results in eventual family breakdowns which are extremely costly in solely economic terms. The macro socio-economic implications of such breakdowns need to be quantified transparently with regards to their subsequent burden on the economy and the taxpayers."

As part of the discussions on the need to include families in the Millennium Development Goals and post-2015 Development Agenda, Noor added that framing policies with the intention to strengthen families will empower them and lessen their dependence on the state.

Noor also highlighted potential ways in which to build a family centred policy framework which would include working to end poverty, maternal mortality, child marriages and domestic violence. Additionally, she stressed the need for policies that empower families to change their own lives instead of those that seek to overtake their functions.

The suggested policies include those that support relationship building through education for couples and parents; to support rather than penalise two-parent families; recognise the value

of empowering the role of men in families allowing them to take an active role with childcare; recognise and respect the equal rights of women within the family as well as their rights as individuals; to recognise childbirth as a social function and guarantee families the rights to social and economic support for childcare, allowing couples to balance their family and work responsibilities; address the needs of families who care for elderly and disabled family members; and to support intergenerational living arrangements.

DIFI also held a briefing at the UN about the upcoming Doha Conference themed '*Empowering Families: A Pathway to Development*' in which HE Alya Al Thani, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the UN praised DIFI and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' efforts aimed at a better understanding of family issues. HE Alya Al Thani emphasised the importance of the State of Qatar's efforts to promote the family since the first Doha international conference on the family in 2004.

Executive Director, Noor Al Jehani went on to outline DIFI's commitment to the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (2014) through this year's Doha Conference that will be held on April 16-17 in Qatar, under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development.

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About the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI)

DIFI is a leading international institution in Qatar that supports research, policy and outreach programs that promote the development of Arab families. With research as its core focus, DIFI supports a wide range of international, regional and local evidence-based studies relating to marriage and family structure, women, fertility and demography, child and family safety, and parenting. The Institution is comprised of three divisions; *Family Research Division*, *Family Policy Division* and *Social Outreach Division*. Its body of work includes contributions to the UN Secretary General's campaign to end violence against women; international and regional colloquia in partnership with most UN funds and programmers, including UNDESA, UNFPA, UNAIDS and UNICEF; and the funding and development of a wide range of publications on family in the new millennium. A member of Qatar Foundation, it has a Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

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