



Statement by

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**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FIJI
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**Third Committee
Item 60
"Rights of Children"**

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PERMANENT MISSION OF FIJI TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Mr. Chairman,

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to address this Committee. The deliberations of this Committee are important and certainly the subject of this session's agenda on the rights of the Child is of immense significance to us all.

We are committed and fully supportive of the rights of the child and more particularly the right of all children to be brought up in a home with a mother and father as part of an intact, nuclear family. This is the ideal that has helped sustain societies over many centuries but which unfortunately appears to be under attack from various quarters. Fiji wishes to recall the words contained in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (Convention), that the family is "*the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children.*"

Mr. Chairman,

At a time when some would look at children's "rights" in isolation from the familial context, or seek to weaken the role of mothers and fathers in the care and upbringing of children, it is equally important to emphasize that the primacy of the family structure, is entitled to the support and protection by the State.

We firmly believe and are committed to uphold the right of mothers and fathers to raise their children in accordance with their values and mores. Parents – mothers and fathers – are not to be supplanted by the State, but rather, as stated in Article 18 of the Convention, "*have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child.*" This primary responsibility should be acknowledged and safeguarded.

Only too often in the rarefied atmosphere of these halls we hear talks of rights without any reference to corresponding responsibilities. Rights and responsibilities are not set up in opposition to each other, but rather, are mutually supportive and reinforcing. Children have a right to receive upbringing, care and education from their parents, and parents have a duty to provide their children with such. So, too, do children have a responsibility to honor and obey their parents, and parents have a right to expect such honor and obedience.

Sometimes in the modern world, these observations may appear archaic and out of date, yet Mr. Chairman, some of the difficulties faced by young people today could partly be traced to what appears to be a concerted effort to destroy the family.

Mr. Chairman,

Parents are the primary nurturers and educators of their children, and the family is the fortress from which children depart as well-adjusted individuals and responsible adults ready to participate fully in society. This is a very important principle, one which is acknowledged by the Convention. The preamble puts it well: for the "*full and harmonious development of his or her personality*," the child "*should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.*"

In speaking of the supportive role that governments are to give to the family, we must also be sensitive to the principle of subsidiarity. Decisions are not to be imposed top down – and certainly not from far off places like New York or Geneva – but are best made at the social level closest to those affected. In other words, where children are concerned, the family is the social unit closest to them, and governments must never advocate policies that impact adversely upon what the Universal Declaration on Human Rights similarly calls "*the natural and fundamental group unit of society.*"

Among the rights of parents recognized by the Universal Declaration with respect to the upbringing of children is the right given to them to choose what kind of education their children shall receive. As Article 26 forcefully states, "*Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.*" Neither the State nor the United Nations nor its various agencies should ever seek to supplant the primary role of parents as educators of their children. For it is only in safeguarding the rights of parents and the rights of the family that we truly safeguard the rights of children.

To sum up, Mr. Chairman, it makes no sense to speak of children's rights in isolation or as if they exist in a vacuum. Rather, the rights of children are embedded in a social context, the natural family, and their rights can never be asserted by third persons as being in tension with those of the family, or of parents. For to speak of the rights of the child is to speak of the rights of the family and of parents, as well as the responsibility of each child and parent for the welfare of the other.

I invite the Third Committee to keep these points in mind as this agenda item on the rights of the child is discussed.

It is in this spirit of solidarity that I assure you of Fiji's desire to work closely with other Member States and the United Nations and its agencies towards protecting the rights of the child, properly understood and in proper context.

Thank you.