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ALVARÉ: WOMEN'S WELLBEING INCLUDES THE FAMILY

Holy See's UN Mission Discusses Status of Women

By Genevieve Pollock

NEW YORK, MARCH 1, 2011 (<[A href="http://www.zenit.org">Zenit.org\).- The current U.N. efforts for the health and wellbeing of women lack an appreciation of how the love experienced in family life helps them flourish, says Helen Alvaré.](http://www.zenit.org)

The law professor and advisor of the Pontifical Council for the Laity made these comments to ZENIT after participating as a panelist at an event last week on the occasion of the 55th Session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women.

The panel discussion on "Health and Education: Advancing the Wellbeing of Women and Children" was sponsored by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations and the Permanent Mission of St. Lucia to the United Nations, along with the Path to Peace Foundation.

Commenting on the U.N.'s current work in this area, Alvaré observed that "there is an insufficient amount of attention paid to the role played by woman-friendly sexual mores, stable marriage, and parenting as factors contributing to the wellbeing of women."

"It seems there is a tendency to think rather of the woman and the girl as individual rights-bearers," she noted, "despite both women's and girls' aspirations to be in a family, and the significant amount of empirical data linking women's flourishing -- physically, emotionally, educationally, etc. -- to their experience of loving and being loved within a family context."

Alvaré acknowledged that "often the very real problems that can crop up in the family context -- violence being the most notable, of course -- can prevent observers from acknowledging the goods that families bring to their members and to society."

She continued, "It is also possible that some of the presumptions -- about men, about marriage and about the whole notion of complementarity, for example -- that played important roles in the feminisms of the late 20th century are still coloring the perceptions of some of the leading national and international voices speaking out on behalf of women."

Unique voice

Alvaré noted that the Church offers its unique contribution in speaking out for the wellbeing of women in response to these other voices in the United Nations and elsewhere.

Alvaré observed, "The Church uniquely combines a call for woman's dignity and equality as a creature made in God's image with a willingness to acknowledge differences between men and women where these are relevant to the flourishing of individuals, families and societies, with support for male-female 'synergy'/complementarity, and the frank recognition of original sin."

The Church does this "in a way that both calls women and men to be their best selves, while helping to explain or account for situations when they fail to so behave," she added.

Alvaré continued: "The Church also, in her zeal for the marriage of reason and faith, is very skilled at seeking out and bringing the best of modern intellectual developments to bear on the situations and problems of women and men today.

"She does not have a crystal ball, but she knows that she will be able to 'see' the present and the likely future better if she uses the best data from both reason and faith to illuminate what is happening in the world."

The panelist concluded that the Church "feels free to go where this evidence takes her, no matter the popular or unpopular currents of the times."