

As a preface to this story it is important to understand that during the 1990's the United Nations had assumed a new role as "international lawmaker"; creating laws many of which were hostile to the traditional family and religion. The Habitat II conference was designed to develop a "blueprint for international laws for the coming century." The intent was for these laws to set a precedent that would directly affect the laws made in countries around the world. The 25,000 participants of the conference consisted of government officials and non-government organization (NGO) alike. In the previous four conferences, the NGO's were predominately opposed to traditional family values; the most powerful being the Women's Caucus, a US feminist organization headed by Bella Abzug. Their success in the previous four conferences had created language in the international documents that supported same-sex "marriage" and abortion on demand. The purpose of this final conference was to draft this offensive language, making it international law. It was into this setting that UFI showed up with 30 delegates one of whom was Richard Wilkins. This is his story.

THE FAMILY  
FINDS A

# Voice

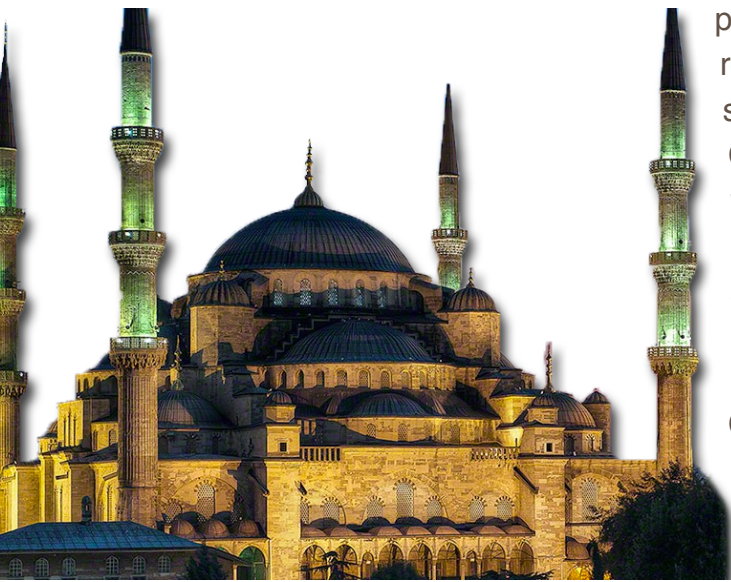
UFI EMERGES AS A LEADER IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

By Dr. Richard G. Wilkins

I first became involved with issues of family policy and society in June 1996 when, almost by accident, I attended a United Nations Conference in Istanbul, Turkey. The conference, known as Habitat II, was the culmination of a decade-long series of conferences designed to develop a "blueprint" for international (and ultimately domestic) legal relations during the coming century. These conferences have been accurately perceived as significant international law-making events. They have also followed a predictable (and extreme) ideological course primarily championed by a powerful lobby

that, according to one scholar, "ha[s] marginalized parents, ignored the family, denigrated cultural and religious values and enshrined reproductive and sexual health." What made the Istanbul Conference remarkable was that it departed from this set course.

As a result of an unusual series of events, I was selected to give a four-minute speech before one of the drafting committees at the Habitat Conference. The speakers who took the podium-



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before me urged the conferees to recognize same-sex partnerships, increase funding for adolescent sexual reproductive services, provide 18 to 20 hours a day of government-sponsored daycare and take all “necessary steps” to insure that every woman was “fully employed” outside the home. Marriage and family, if noted at all by these speakers, were referenced primarily as institutions that reinforce odious cultural stereotypes and that subjugate and demean women. My message was rather different. I began my remarks by informing the conference that the family — as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other important UN documents — is the fundamental unit of society. It is the fundamental unit, moreover, precisely because it is the laboratory where little boys learn to love, respect and work with little girls and where little girls learn

the same essential skills in dealing with little boys. I reminded the delegates that, if we don’t learn these skills within the home, there is little chance that we will learn them elsewhere. Accordingly, I urged the delegates to do what they could to strengthen the family, rather than expend the vast majority of their energies creating substitute social structures.

I pointed out, for example, that extensive studies had shown that the incidence of teenage pregnancy and abortions actually increases following the initiation of “traditional” sex education programs that emphasize the teaching of technical sexual “know-how,” including the use of prophylactics. By contrast, however, the incidence of adolescent pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted disease is actually reduced through family-based education programs.

At the conclusion of my short remarks, I emphasized the essential message of the ... “Proclamation on the Family”: that there is a “fundamental connection” between a decent society and “the reinforcement of strong, stable families.” The family, I reminded the delegates in Istanbul, is the necessary foundation for ... 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. The basic structure of society, I asserted, “is build upon the fundamental values fostered by strong families.” I concluded by urging the conference to consider seriously the need to protect traditional values in drafting and implementing the Habitat Agenda.

The reaction to the speech was remarkable.

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Many of the speakers who had preceded me at the podium hissed as I returned to my seat. But most of the delegates in the audience gave me a standing ovation. Indeed, after the speech, I was approached by the ambassador from Saudi Arabia who embraced me warmly. “Where have you been?” he asked. Next, he asked a very important question: “What can we do?”

I gave the ambassador a short list of items that could be changed in the draft Habitat Agenda that would strengthen, rather than weaken, the family’s central role. Thirty-six hours later, the heads of the Arab delegations in Istanbul issued a joint statement, announcing to the entire Habitat Conference that its members would not sign the Habitat Agenda unless (and until) certain important changes were made.

As a result, and at the insistence of the heads of

the Arab delegations, several very important changes were made in the Habitat Agenda. Instead of defining “marriage” and/or “family” in a manner that explicitly legitimated same-sex “marriages” and families (as did the original draft), the final Habitat Agenda defined the marital relationship as one between “husband and wife.” Instead of numerous explicit paragraphs mandating worldwide abortion on demand, only (somewhat hedged) reference to “reproductive health” remained. The Habitat Agenda, finally, formally recognized the “family” as “the basic unit of society” that “should be strengthened.”

These developments, viewed from the perspective of current American and European legal trends, are significant. The Habitat Conference sent a strong message that strengthening the family — not the simple

recognition of more “rights” or the creation of additional substitute social units — is the answer to many of our modern problems.

This message of course, is obvious. The family is the basic unit of society and must be strengthened. The fact that this message is obvious had not prevented us from ignoring it. During the past 50 years, American and other societies have been much more preoccupied with the individual and the individual’s rights than the basic social unit within which individuals survive and thrive. The consequences are now becoming apparent around the globe.

***Editors Note:*** *Families around the world are still benefiting from the results of this conference. The offensive language was removed and in its place language was drafted that continues to give protection to many vital family issues today.*

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