The Religious Right at the Beijing+5 PrepCom

By Jennifer Butler

April 25, 2000

As a United Nations preparatory committee met to begin the five year review of the Platform for Action of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, Austin Ruse, Director of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-FAM), sent out a call to action. In his rallying cry, Ruse summoned hundreds of "pro-family and pro-life advocates" to come to the UN to fight against "the Beijing Platform for Action...one of the most radical and dangerous documents you can imagine." His call took on biblical proportions as he promised his people, "You will work alongside Catholics, Evangelicals, Jews, Muslims, Mormons." "We are the children of Abraham," claimed Ruse, "arising to fight for faith and family."

The Platform for Action feared by Ruse was adopted by consensus by the 189 countries represented at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The most comprehensive document on women's rights ever agreed upon by governments, the Platform for Action represents the culmination of four global women's conferences. Most significantly, the Beijing Conference signaled the realization of a global women's movement that is seeking to address the diverse issues that affect women worldwide. The Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Forum outside Beijing drew 40,000 women from all parts of the world, breaking all records of NGO attendance at a UN meeting.

The Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the Beijing Plus Five Special Session of the General Assembly met from March 3 to 18 to work on an Outcome Document for the Special Session in June. On the first day of the PrepCom, scores of lobbyists wearing red buttons emblazoned with the word "motherhood" swarmed the room where government delegates were gathering. While conservative and pro-life groups have attended other United Nations events, their numbers at this meeting were far greater than ever before. They were highly visible among the 1,700 NGO representatives and appear to
have reached their goal of having at least 300 participants. Who were these "motherhood" advocates and what do they seek to accomplish?

This report explores the origins and agenda of this "pro-family" coalition, its impact on the Beijing Plus Five PrepCom and possible impact on the UN community. Information about this emerging coalition is based on their literature as well as scholarly research on the Religious Right.

The Religious Right in the United States
Conservative religious political activism, while relatively new in the NGO community at the UN, is not new in the United States. The "pro-family" coalition at the PrepCom emerged from this seasoned US political movement.

The Christian Right has played an increasingly vocal role in United States politics since the 1970s. After the landslide defeat of Barry Goldwater the 1964 presidential election, the Old Right of the Republican Party, recognizing that its message had failed, modernized its ideology and renamed itself the New Right. Their message appealed to many groups that had not previously been a part of the Old Right, including conservative Christians. During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the New Right was able to politically mobilize growing numbers of conservative Christians who, until the 1970s, had only been marginally involved in politics. These conservative, largely white, middle-class Christians are now a major part of the right, which over the past three decades has developed a well-financed and well-run infrastructure consisting of publications, research centers, think tanks, funders, campus organizations and youth groups.(1)

Although largely Christian, the coalition of "pro-family" organizations at the PrepCom included Mormons and Muslims. These groups are therefore referred to below as the Religious Right or the "pro-family" coalition.

The Roots of the Religious Right NGO Coalition at the UN
The large numbers of "pro-family" delegates can be deceiving, since they actually represent only a handful of organizations based mainly in the United States and Canada. Still, while only a few conservative organizations participated in the PrepCom, these organizations each represent a powerful, well-organized constituency base. Each has access to vast financial resources and demonstrates a growing interest in influencing the United Nations.

Most of the organizations of the Religious Right coalition at the PrepCom have
been developing alliances over the past few years, primarily through the Second World Congress of Families (WCF) meeting convened by the Mormon World Family Policy Center: NGO Family Voice and the Howard Center. The World Congress of Families II, held in Geneva in November 1999, is a follow up to the World Congress of Families I, a smaller conference held in March 1997.

Estimates put WCF II attendance at between 800 and 1,575 participants. One report suggests that at least half of the representatives were from the United States and a large percentage was Mormon. The WCF II was billed as a response to the “organized efforts at the United Nations and other international agencies to discredit or deny traditional family life.” The goals of the conference, as stated by conference organizers, echo the goals of the "pro-family" representatives at the Beijing Plus Five PrepCom. The goals are:

- To proclaim the family as the fundamental unit of society.
- To rally organizations and individuals to protect and fortify the natural family, at the national and international levels.
- To change the basic terms of debate on issues affecting family life.
- To develop guidelines for creation of family-centered policies and laws.

According to their mission statements, the sponsoring organizations, unlike many conservative organizations, seek to reform UN policies and agreements rather than to bring about the organization's demise. Most of the conservative organizations at the PrepCom began working together through the WCF II or are now supporting its campaign.

The "pro-family" Coalition
The NGO Family Voice, the Howard Center, C-FAM, and to a lesser degree, the Family Research Council have provided the leadership in forging this Religious Right coalition. Each of the organizations is well connected to major leadership in each of the faith constituencies it represents. Because these organizations do not yet have NGO accreditation at the United Nations, they relied on a handful of other conservative NGOs to grant participants access to the PrepCom. The World Family Policy Center: NGO Family Voice was founded by Richard G. Wilkins, a law professor at Brigham Young University (BYU) - the Utah-based Mormon university. Wilkins founded NGO Family Voice with the cooperation of BYU president Merrill J. Batemen. NGO Family Voice, as it is commonly called, is "devoted to providing world-wide democratic input on "pro-family" and other value-based issues within the UN system." NGO Family Voice also provides legal
United Families International (UFI), founded and directed by Susan Roylance, accredited "pro-family" participants at the PrepCom. Roylance organized a conservative Mormon presence at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women and the Habitat II Conference in 1996. In fact, Roylance first convinced Richard Wilkins (NGO Family Voice) to try to influence UN Conferences and international law by telling him about preparations for the Habitat Conference. His experience organizing around family and pro-life issues at Habitat, referred to by supporters as "the Istanbul Miracle," inspired him to found the NGO Family Voice with the cooperation of BYU Law School and the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies. UFI, along with Concerned Women for America, is one of the few female-headed NGOs in the Religious Right coalition.

The Howard Center was established in 1997 "to provide research and understanding that demonstrate and affirm family and religion as the foundation of a virtuous and free society." The Howard Center describes itself to be a resource center for information about "the natural family, the benefits of a religious-based family culture, and a variety of influences wittingly and unwittingly working against the natural family." Interestingly, the center clarifies that it is "not an advocacy group; we do not lobby institutions." Whether or not the Howard Center had an NGO delegate at the Beijing PrepCom meeting, the center clearly has helped shape the agenda of Religious Right representatives.

The Howard Center's founder and director, Dr. Allan C. Carlson, is well connected in the Republican Party. Among other political appointments, Dr. Carlson was appointed by President Reagan to serve on the National Commission on Children. Carlson is the former President of the Rockford Institute, which seeks the "renewal of Christendom" through the "defense of family, promotion of liberty, decentralization of political and economic life, the adherence to truth revealed through scripture, and the celebration of literary and artistic inheritance of our civilization."

The Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-FAM) was founded in 1997 by Human Life International, the "world's largest pro-life and "pro-family" apostolate with 56 US Chapters and a network of international branches and affiliates serving 88 countries." Austin Ruse, C-FAM's director, was on the planning committee for the WCF II. C-FAM is also listed as one of six co-convening organizations. One researcher suggests that "while other groups provide
Ruse is the person who attends the UN conferences and attempts to make the "pro-family" agenda have an impact. His aim is to establish a block of 12 countries to halt 'anti-family policy' at the UN."

During the Beijing plus Five Preparatory Commission, C-FAM published the daily newspaper Vivant! and provided the office space for the "pro-family" coalition, referred to in publications as the NGO Caucus for Stable Families. C-FAM's mission statement states:

C-FAM will be an advocate on behalf of the rights and responsibilities of men, women and children, especially within the framework of the family as the fundamental unit of society. In keeping with human dignity and liberty as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), CAFHRI respects the diversity of cultural traditions and religions. The latter statement demonstrates how the Religious Right borrows from the debate on cultural relativism and human rights. The "pro-family" coalition bills the global women's movement as an anti-religious, Western feminist imposition on developing nations.

A recently posted C-FAM job announcement shows how C-FAM perceives its role in the "pro-family" coalition:

- C-FAM is the first full time pro-life and "pro-family" office working at the UN headquarters.
- C-FAM works exclusively on issues related to life and family within the UN context.
- C-FAM is at the center of an international coalition of groups that work with UN bureaucrats and diplomats in protecting the unborn and the family.

Concerned Women for America (CWA), a Conservative Evangelical protestant women's organization, had a team of four women at the PrepCom and published daily news briefs on its website. Founded by Beverly LaHaye in the early eighties, CWA claims to be the nation's largest public policy women's organization. Researcher Jean Hardisty of Political Research Associates confirms that it has as many members as National Organization for Women. The organization's mission is to "protect the family through prayer and action." Beverly LaHaye is well connected to the Christian Right. She is wife of Tim LaHaye, the cofounder of the
Moral Majority and a well-known Christian right leader. Founding members of CWA's advisory council include the wives of Jerry Falwell, Senator Jesse Helms, and television evangelist Jimmy Swaggart.

LaHaye recently established The Beverly La Haye Institute, which sent participants to the WCF II. Dr. Allan Carlson was the keynote speaker at a forum sponsored in October 1999 by LaHaye's new research institute. The CWA web site urges members to sign the petition "A Call for Families of the World" that emerged from the World Congress of Families.

Tom Minnery, Vice President of Public Policy of Focus on the Family, also a leading Conservative Evangelical organization, attended a press conference at the UN organized by C-FAM during the PrepCom. Founded by Dr. James Dobson, a Christian Right leader, Focus on the Family has 2.1 million members and an annual budget of 110 million. Focus on the Family and C-FAM came together to make a statement in opposition to the See Change Campaign, an effort led by Catholics for a Free Choice to revoke the Vatican's Observer State status. The title of the press release describes their view of the event: "Focus on the Family Joins Historic Alliance of Evangelicals, Catholics and Muslims to Defend Catholic Church at the United Nations."

The Family Research Council, which has close connections with Focus on the Family, was one of the six co-convening organizations of the WCF II and has published many articles authored by WCF II participants and "pro-family" representatives attending the PrepCom, including Dale O'Leary and Richard Wilkins. In 1998, FRC could boast a membership of 445,000 and a budget of $14 million. Until recently, Gary Bauer headed the organization.

The FRC has a United Nations Project aimed at reforming the UN so that it is more in line with the political goals of the Religious Right. The FRC's United Nations Project seeks "to call the UN to account for its failure to protect human rights around the world despite its obligation to do so under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

These organizations appear to be the major catalysts in the religious right coalition at the UN, but others were present as well and, importantly, have consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Organizations with consultative status may attend UN meetings open to NGO involvement. Real Women of Canada and the International Right to Life Federation enabled
religious conservatives to obtain the credentials necessary to participate in the PrepCom. Real Women of Canada, whose mission is "To reaffirm that the family is society's most important unit and to promote the equality, advancement and well-being of women," was present at the World Congress of Families and links its web site to C-FAM.

The International Right to Life Federation (IRLF), based in Cincinnati, accredited at least six people. Mr. J.C. Wilke is the president of IRLF and is also with the Life Issues Institute (mentioned in Vivant!), which shares the same address as IRLF. IRLF claims chapters in 170 countries. The National Right to Life Committee, one of the largest "pro-life" (anti-choice) organizations in the US, also has ECOSOC status and accredited a few participants.

The Couple to Couple League (CCL), a Catholic organization, accredited twenty participants. The World Movement of Mothers, based in Geneva, accredited several participants as well. The World Movement of Mothers now serves on the Executive Committee of the NGO Committee on the Family, a substantive committee of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO).

Religious Right groups often place a high priority on organizing youth, and this "pro-family" coalition is no exception. The World Youth Alliance (WYA) was the name given to the group of youth at the PrepCom meeting, although the youth were not accredited by WYA and knew little if anything about the organization when questioned. Mostly inexperienced and uniformed conservative youth were led by a handful of leaders who did understand the PrepCom process and shaped the issues for the youth. Most likely, WYA does not have an organizational structure and membership. It describes itself in Vivant! As having grown out of the participation of "pro-family" groups around the UN Youth Forums in Braga and the Hague. The same article attributes much of the organizing of WYA to Ryan Nelson, an NGO Family Voice delegate. WYA activities are also mentioned in Religious Right coverage of the ICPD plus five proceedings.

One of the few non-North American NGOs from the religious right was True Love Waits of Kenya. True Love Waits is a Southern Baptist initiated interfaith campaign to get youth to make a commitment to wait until marriage to have sex (one can become a 'secondary virgin' by the grace of God). The Baptist World Alliance has carried this campaign to 165 Baptist groups around the world.

While a few Muslims were accredited by the "pro-family" coalition, little if any
organizational presence existed. At the World Congress of Families II, only one of the six co-convening organizations was Muslim and a only few Muslims gave presentations.

The "Pro-family" Platform
The history and conflict over abortion is familiar. The "pro-family" coalition, perhaps because of Catholic involvement, advocates an extreme stance on most reproductive health issues, rejecting modern forms of birth control such as the pill and condoms.

Other parts of the "pro-family" platform require more explanation. Coalition members wore large red buttons emblazoned the first week with "motherhood;" the second week with "the Family." Outside this political context, such slogans would be benign. After all, women's rights advocates protect motherhood and family by working to reduce maternal mortality and drawing international attention to the key role mothers play in development, to name a few examples. In fact, one well-respected NGO in the global women's movement is named "MADRE" in honor of the strong mothers who hold their communities together.

While family and motherhood are concepts of equal concern to women's rights and Religious Right activists, the two sides define family and motherhood differently. Women's rights activists advocate that women have the right to choose motherhood. Motherhood does not confine women to the private sphere. In fact, women's rights activists have observed that women in public leadership are often more sensitive to the needs of families and mothers. In contrast, for the "pro-family" coalition, women do not choose motherhood, they are, by nature, mothers. They view women as biologically suited to serve primarily in the private sphere, not to have careers.

"Pro-family" NGOs believe that the family is disintegrating because of feminism, the sexual revolution, gay rights and liberalism. In their view, feminism has devalued "traditional" female roles. "Pro-family" advocates bill themselves as the true protectors of women and sometimes even use the language of women's rights in describing their mission. In doing so, they portray feminists as imposters or a fringe group that does not speak for the majority of women. The very name of the organization, "REAL Women," states this view clearly.

The "pro-family" leader Kathryn Balmforth of the World Family Policy Center: NGO Family Voice decries the "emphasis" in the PrepCom's outcome document
on "getting women into the paid workforce and out of their homes and families." For Balmforth, families who depend on childcare undermine the family and society. Rather than condemn women for working outside the home, she portrays them as deluded by feminism or victimized by poverty. Women are forced by economic necessity or misled by feminists to work outside the home and neglect their families. Balmforth claims that women therefore need to be "liberated from their jobs and free to raise children." Quotas and affirmative action programs, as Austin Ruse puts it, "force women out of the home and into places they don't necessarily want to be." Quotas are also considered to be undemocratic.

Underlying these concerns is an outrage at the feminist assertion that gender is a social construct that benefits men at the expense of women. According to one "pro-family" advocate, "The abolition of this sexual division of labor amounts to the abolition of motherhood." Sex differences based on women's biological capacity to bear children are constantly stressed in their literature. Women's role in society, they say, is to bear children and nurture families.

The Religious Right's Tactics
The relationship between the "pro-family" coalition and the Vatican is the subject of much speculation. Clearly, Vatican statements and positions closely parallel much of the agenda and language of the "pro-family" coalition. The Earth Negotiations Bulletin (3/20/00) reports that there was "speculation in the UN corridors that the Holy See hopes that these groups will continue to lobby for conservative positions on reproductive health that it can no longer openly call for within the context of post-Beijing and ICPD agreements."

"Pro-family" representatives also attempted to exploit North-South political differences. Their media and public statements paint much of the Beijing Platform for Action as an attempt by Western nations to impose their culture on "UN-dependent countries with different cultural and religious values and beliefs." "Pro-family" organizations perceive developing nations as being more religious and as favoring large, traditional families and therefore seek to build on this perceived commonality.

The Religious Right coalition sought to overwhelm the PrepCom by sheer numbers since they lack organizational representation. While most NGOs try to keep their accredited participants to a reasonable number so as not to crowd others out, the numbers of "pro-family" NGO representatives were far out of
proportion to the number of organizations they represented. Surprisingly, many "pro-family" representatives were not well informed and were stumped by the use of basic terms such as "NGO," "CSW," and "PrepCom." Some were unclear about what organization had accredited them to the process. At least a third of the "pro-family" NGO representatives were male, in an NGO arena that is predominantly female.

In some cases, they engaged in objectionable and aggressive behavior. A group of cassocked Catholic friars surrounded individual women's rights activists and began to pray. One target, feeling imprisoned by the friars who held hands around her, shouted, "I come from a long line of Lutherans and I am proud of what I stand for! Let me go!" Several of her colleagues came over to support her. Women's rights advocates also rallied around lesbian participants who felt vulnerable to verbal abuse.

"Pro-family" representatives targeted specific caucuses (issue oriented and regional NGO working groups) in an attempt to outvote feminist NGOs or slow down discussions by focussing on singular issues such as abortion. The youth and health caucuses were primary targets. Pro-family leaders had organized the presence of at least forty youth under the name World Youth Alliance. Youth caucus leaders report that a high percentage of the youth were young men and from the Washington D.C. area.

Feminist efforts to maintain a representational democracy were met with protests by conservatives that feminist NGOs were not being democratic and transparent. However, "pro-family" NGOs did not openly advertise their own strategy meetings nor did they display their lobbying materials as most other NGOs do.

The Religious Right in the US maintains extensive alternative media networks which help propagate their views. This "pro-family" group is no exception. A well-financed newsletter, Vivant!, published by the "NGO Caucus for Stable Families" (run out of the C-FAM office), presented the "pro-family" perspective on daily events. Websites of CWA and Family Voice also carried daily news briefs of the proceedings. Many NGOs and some government delegates expressed frustration that "pro-family" news propagated misinformation and misrepresented individuals.

It is difficult to know whether the Religious Right contributed to the failure of the
intergovernmental negotiators to reach consensus on the document for Beijing Plus Five. Still, it is clear that their presence slowed the work of NGO caucuses seeking to move beyond Beijing.

The intensity of "pro-family" organizing led some government delegations to criticize the NGO presence in general. The European Union, supported by JUSCANZ and Mexico, issued a strongly worded statement criticizing those who had attempted to hinder the work of the PrepCom.

The Response of Feminist NGOs
Governments had agreed before the meeting that the Platform for Action could not be reopened for debate during the review process. Therefore, most caucuses countered Religious Right attempts to reverse gains made at Beijing by stating simply that the Platform for Action was not open for debate. While the caucuses found this clarification helpful and exhibited strong leadership (in particular the youth caucus which was inundated by the Religious Right), the continued pressure slowed the work of some caucuses.

Women's rights activists printed green buttons with the slogan "I support the PFA (Platform for Action)." The green buttons enabled government delegates who support the Platform for Action to recognize supportive NGO participants. The youth caucus quickly produced buttons and T-shirts emblazoned with "Youth for Human Rights." Feminist religious NGOs had a stronger presence than ever before. Ecumenical Women 2000+, a coalition of Protestant UN offices and ecumenical organizations, brought to the PrepCom a group of Protestant women from all over the world. Protestant churches support the Beijing Platform for Action and have been active in the UN conferences on women.

Religion Counts, an initiative of Catholics for a Free Choice and the Park Ridge Center, brought together an interfaith group of women from around the world to lobby government delegates. A religion caucus initiated by Ecumenical Women 2000+ and Religion Counts printed stickers with the words "Women of faith believe in the PFA" which were very popular among all of the women's rights activists.

The two organizations also conducted a series of three panels called "Religion: Women's Liberation, Women's Bondage," which drew large crowds. The panels featured women of all faiths discussing their struggle towards gender equality within their religious traditions. Because of the interest in religion at the
committee meeting, the Religion Caucus held a fourth panel discussion called "Religions for the PFA."

Religious organizations that support the Beijing Platform for Action added an important dimension to the organizing of women's rights activists. The Religious Right cannot bill the global women's movement as "ungodly" and anti-religious when a significant number of religious organizations and individuals are a part of the movement. The women's movement cannot so easily be demonized when others of the same faith traditions as the "pro-family" coalition support the Platform for Action. Religious groups in support of Beijing also play a crucial role by helping religious communities understand the faith basis for working towards gender justice.

Trends in Religious Right Organizing at the UN
Two aspects of this Religious Right NGO coalition are quite unique. First, religious conservatives have traditionally been suspicious of interfaith relations and ecumenical work. Interfaith coalitions among conservative Catholics, conservative evangelicals, Mormons and Muslims are rare and unique. This interfaith coalition among religious conservatives might suggest that religious conservatives increasingly find more in common with religious conservatives of other faiths than they do with non-conservatives in their own faith traditions. This represents a radical realignment of religious and political interests.

Secondly, the Religious Right has traditionally favored the dissolution of the United Nations. These groups, though, claim an interest in working through UN to achieve their objectives. In fact, the greatest challenge the Religious Right may face in organizing at the UN may be resistance from its own community. Many Christian right and far right organizations in the Protestant tradition are highly critical of the attempt by these organizations to work within the system rather than trying to do away with the UN.

Third, the agenda of this "pro-family" coalition has been shaped by US politics and represents a spill over of US politics into the NGO community and international arena. The rhetoric and polarization brought by "pro-family" forces echo that of the current Republican Congress and Religious Right in the US. The rhetoric and strategies of the "pro-family" forces also echo current struggles between the Religious Right, moderates and liberals in mainline Protestant churches in the US.
The momentum in this coalition has been building over the past few years, as demonstrated by the relationships built through the World Congress of Families gatherings. The "pro-family" coalition is led by some of the major Religious Right leadership in the United States. Despite occasional set backs, the Religious Right has maintained a great deal of political power in the US and is very well organized and well funded.

News articles from "pro-family" organizations convey that the leadership feels a sense of accomplishment and excitement about the work accomplished at the PrepCom. Austin Ruse has started including action suggestions in his weekly news releases called "Friday Faxes" because, he says, of the enthusiastic desire in his constituency to support his efforts. C-FAM is also expanding its staff by at least one member, according to a recent news release. Executive Director Mark Hayden, Director of the Couple to Couple League, demonstrates his enthusiasm when he rhetorically asks, "How important is the involvement of CCL in this "pro-family" coalition? The answer comes from Pope John Paul II... "The future of humanity passes by way of the family. If we do not protect the family now, who will be around to protect it later?"" Current indicators thus suggest that the "pro-family" coalition plans to continue and build upon its efforts.

Responding to Religious Right Organizing

Until now, the NGO community has generally consisted of progressive social justice advocates encouraging states to take greater steps to ensure human rights and promote peace and development. The growing presence of Religious Right NGOs, who define such issues differently, will clearly change the nature of NGO organizing.

The NGO community, which runs according to the rules of democracy, clearly will be open to the participation of NGOs from the Religious Right. As new organizations enter the community, however, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the UN (CONGO) may increasingly need to find ways to structure this democracy to promote fair play and prevent conflict. Understandably, many NGOs are wary of supporting any attempt by CONGO to organize or structure the NGO presence at the UN for fear that it might limit NGO access. Unfortunately, the lack of power and structure vested in CONGO can also hinder the effectiveness of the NGO community and democratic processes as demonstrated at the PrepCom.

NGO committees and informal caucuses at UN meetings may have to more
clearly define their missions and membership criterion. For example, the health caucus at Beijing Plus Five meetings might be more accurately labelled the "pro-choice health caucus." Since the Religious Right often adopts the language of women's rights, yet defines such words differently, mission statements for NGO Committees and caucuses will need to be very specific in defining their goals.

Pro-feminist religious NGOs can play an important role by presenting a different religious perspective. Religion plays a key role in the lives of women as well as government delegates and state politics. The Religious Right does not have hegemony on religious language—a powerful feminist movement exists in all of the world's religions. The Religious Right demonizes feminists in part by painting the feminist movement as a movement of "Godless radicals." A feminist religious stance shakes up this simplistic dichotomy and makes demonizing feminists more difficult.

Feminist religious NGOs can speak powerfully to the positive and negative role religion can play in women's lives, and be a witness to the international community of how religion and culture can and are being transformed in favor of gender equality. Ecumenical Women 2000+ and Religion Counts played this role at the PrepCom. Feminists, both non-religious and religious, felt that the presence of religious feminists was an asset to the community.

NGOs in support of women's rights and justice will need to improve their communication systems. The Religious Right has an excellent communication system, which includes impressive websites. Progressive organizations can emulate the Religious Right's use of technology. The ability to communicate with the public is crucial given the fact that the Religious Right often misconstrues and misinforms its public. Feminists and all concerned NGOs need to be ready to provide accurate information to constituencies sought out by the right.

Lastly, NGOs can directly address the concerns that the Religious Right identifies. Clearly, the "pro-family" coalition is capitalizing on concerns held by many in the United States and by people elsewhere in the world as well. Those concerns are real and valid, even if the solutions proposed by the Religious Right fall far short. Women's Rights NGOs can publicize their work on protecting motherhood and family. Feminists can make clear their own responses to the difficulties faced by mothers and families. The work of feminist activists in this area is something we can definitely celebrate publicly.
Coalitions by nature are fragile and unstable. The member organizations of the "pro-family" coalition have many theological and political differences, which could cause the demise of the coalition. Some of their constituencies have traditionally been anti-UN and may doubt the efficacy of organizing at the UN. Still, at this time the "pro-family" coalition is poised to build enthusiastically on its March efforts. NGOs should prepare to meet any challenges they may present.

End Notes
*Jennifer Butler
Ecumenical Women 2000 Plus
Jensbutler@aol.com
www.ew2000plus.org
"Pro-family Websites"
Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute www.c-fam.org
Family Research Council- UN Program www.frc.org/misc/unprojct.html
Concerned Women for America www.cwfa.org
World Congress of Families II www.worldcongress.org
NGO Family Voice www.law.byu.edu/NGO_Family_Voice
Howard Center www.profam.org