

## **Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,**

I am pleased and honored to welcome you to this expert group meeting (EGM) on **Protecting the Arab Family from Poverty: Employment, Social Integration, and Intergenerational Solidarity**, convened as part of the preparations for the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

I would like to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to the experts for accepting to come and share their views and expertise. I also extend my sincere thanks to the United Nations Focal Point on the Family, the representative of the League of Arab States, and all distinguished guests and participants.

Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) is a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, which is supporting Qatar on its journey from a carbon-based to a knowledge-based economy by unlocking human potential. This will not just benefit Qatar; it will benefit the world.

The institute was established in 2006 by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, to reaffirm the family as the fundamental basic unit of society and to promote the family as a key actor in development through research, capacity building, advocacy, and engagement in international family policy development.

The strategic objectives of DIFI are to be proactive in information sharing, networking and awareness building, and to provide a platform for constructive exchange on family issues; not only to discuss challenges facing the family, but also to identify and promote research, best practices, and programs around the world that work for and with families.

To contribute to the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Year of the Family, and to address the trends and challenges facing families, the institute is organizing and co-organizing events such as this EGM to provide evidence-based information and to support the development of sensitive family policies and programs.

The observance of the International Year of the Family in 1994 and the celebration of its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary highlighted the role of the family as the basic unit to every society and the need to pay adequate attention to the interrelationship between the family well-being and sustainable development.

All across the world, family size and structure have changed markedly and continue to evolve in response to powerful social, economic and technological developments, including urbanization and a continuing shift from extended to nuclear families.

As basic and essential building blocks of societies, families have a crucial role in social development. They bear the primary responsibility for the education of children and provide material and non-material care and support to its members; from children to older persons or those suffering from illness. However, families find it more and more difficult to fulfill these multiple roles and tackle all responsibilities in these times of increased uncertainty and crisis.

The challenges facing the family demand a comprehensive, family-based approach to many social and development issues at the national and international levels. Supporting the family, providing social protection, and furthering social integration through the strengthening of intergenerational solidarity are important objectives of social policy and social development and will certainly be further developed and discussed during the two upcoming days.

In this regard, this EGM could be an opportunity to discuss many aspects of family policy, social and economic trends affecting families and the need for adequate policy response, anti-poverty and family-focused policies, balancing work and family responsibilities, family and societal solidarity, and how we mainstream intergenerational solidarity.

I am convinced that your discussions, expertise, guidance, and wide-ranging knowledge on this field will put forward recommendations to enhance national capacities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to formulate family-focused strategies, plans, and programs.

The upcoming 20th anniversary of the International Year of The Family offers an opportunity to add family focus to development efforts with the objective of strengthening them as agent of the development for the benefit of the society at large.

Finally, allow me to once again express my warmest welcome and to wish you all a pleasant stay and successful meeting.

Thank you.