

Natural Deception: Conned by the World Congress of Families

BY Cole Parke, Political Research Associates
www.PoliticalResearch.org

****This article appears in Political Research Associates' Winter, 2015 issue of *The Public Eye* magazine****

From Russia to Nigeria to Australia, a seemingly innocuous definition of the "natural family" is quietly being used as the basis of new laws to justify the criminalization of abortion and LGBTQ people. Pushing this definition is the World Congress of Families, a network of conservative religious leaders from a variety of faiths—and their high-level government friends.

In November 2014, the Christian Right group World Congress of Families (WCF) found itself in the unusual position of having to publicly defend itself. Unlike prominent advocacy groups such as the Family Research Council or Alliance Defending Freedom, the Illinois-based WCF has seldom sought the spotlight, preferring a behind-the-scenes role in its campaign to impose a narrow, Christian Right definition of family as the international norm.

Responding to criticism following the announcement that WCF will host its ninth international summit in Salt Lake City in October 2015, Stanford Swim (a WCF board member and major donor) asserted that WCF's political agenda and ideology were being unfairly scrutinized by local activists and media.¹



Children perform at the World Congress of Families conference in Madrid, Spain in 2012. Photo courtesy of HazteOir.org.

In fact, WCF's activities and global influence have received relatively scant public scrutiny. This is of concern because, contrary to Swim's claim that WCF "does not spread fear," the organization is leading a global legislative and public relations campaign against LGBTQ and reproductive rights. WCF has become a power player on the Religious Right by building bridges between U.S. groups and their international counterparts and fostering a global interfaith coalition of conservative religious orthodoxies. While Political Research Associates² and other researchers have monitored WCF's attempts to rewrite international law using a narrow, Religious Right definition of the family,³ until recently, only a handful of gender justice groups understood WCF's project.

That changed abruptly in June 2013, when global events forced WCF into the U.S. activist spotlight.⁴ That month, Russia passed its now notorious Anti-Propaganda Law, which banned "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors" and prompted a surge in violent attacks on LGBTQ people throughout the country. (The law especially emboldened a right-wing vigilante group, "Occupy Pedophilia," which uses social media to "ambush" gay people by luring them into meetings and then assaulting them on camera.⁵ Online footage of these horrific attacks quickly went viral.⁶)

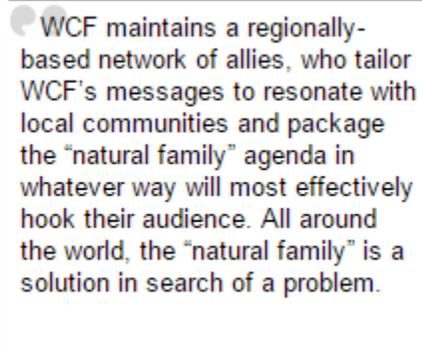
News of the law, along with graphic evidence of its impact, spurred American and European LGBTQ activists to action. Outraged Westerners launched a hastily conceived media counteroffensive, in which gay bar owners and their patrons emptied bottles of Russian vodka in

the streets; LGBTQ sports enthusiasts threatened to boycott the 2013 Sochi Olympics; and one of the U.S.'s largest LGBTQ advocacy groups, Human Rights Campaign, mass-produced t-shirts proclaiming "Love Conquers Hate" in Russian.

While the initial wave of outrage largely took aim at Russia and its leaders—LGBTQ magazine *The Advocate* named Putin its 2014 Person of the Year and described him as "the single greatest threat to LGBTs in the world"—it obscured the culpability of U.S. groups. Rather than being the brainchild of a few homophobic Kremlin insiders, Russia's Anti-Propaganda Law emerged from a years-long, carefully crafted campaign to influence governments to adopt a Christian-Right legal framework, coordinated by an international network of right-wing leaders under the aegis of WCF.

Through large international convenings (its [2007 gathering in Warsaw](#) attracted nearly 4,000 participants⁷), smaller regional events, and closed-door meetings with government officials and religious leaders, WCF has woven a tight, powerful web of right-wing ideologues and activists and has provided them with the tools to grow their numbers and expand their influence. WCF's success is especially evident in Russia,⁸ but its influence also reaches other countries including Nigeria, Australia, and Poland—and international institutions such as the United Nations.

With its doctrine of preserving what it regards as the "natural family," WCF is waging a campaign at local, national, and international levels to ensure that male dominance, heteronormativity (the belief that heterosexuality is the only acceptable sexual orientation), and religious hegemony are core tenets of civil society. "The WCF has created a cultural framework, under the banner of the family, that is inclusive enough to appeal to a broad base," said Gillian Kane, senior policy advisor at Ipas, an international reproductive justice advocacy group. "But it is also so narrowly writ that most of their initiatives and arguments don't hold up under international law."



WCF maintains a regionally-based network of allies, who tailor WCF's messages to resonate with local communities and package the "natural family" agenda in whatever way will most effectively hook their audience. All around the world, the "natural family" is a solution in search of a problem.

WCF, however, is gradually chipping away at international laws designed to protect human rights, posing a direct threat to LGBTQ people, women's reproductive freedom, single parents, mixed families, and other family structures that do not fit into the parameters of WCF's "natural family." At best, those who are deemed "unnatural" by WCF standards could be excluded from the rights and privileges granted to "natural families." At worst, they could be fined or otherwise punished by the state.

ORIGINS AND AGENDA

WCF is a project of the Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society, based in Rockford, Illinois, about a two-hour drive from Chicago. It was founded in 1997 by conservative scholar Allan Carlson, who currently serves as president of both organizations. Carlson has authored nearly a dozen books, including *The Natural Family Where It Belongs: New Agrarian Essays*, published in 2014 and dedicated to Pitirim Sorokin. (Sorokin is one of many WCF links to Russia: the Russian-born conservative sociologist inspired much of Carlson's understanding of the family ⁹).

The Howard Center was birthed from the Rockford Institute, a conservative think tank devoted to “analyzing the damage done to America’s social institutions by the cultural upheaval of the 1960’s.”¹⁰ Carlson joined the Institute’s staff in 1981, serving as its president from 1986-1997. For many years, according to the Howard Center’s own website, the organization exclusively conducted research, disconnected from activism. But in 1995, that began to change.

That year, Carlson was invited to Moscow by Anatoly Antonov and Victor Medkov, sociologists at Lomonosov Moscow State University.¹¹ His hosts were concerned about the demographic shifts they were witnessing in Russia’s post-Soviet era—popularly referred to as the “demographic winter.”¹² As the country struggled to weather political turmoil and economic hardship, the national birthrate was plummeting, alcoholism was on the rise, and—correspondingly—so was the national death rate.

While significant demographic shifts are underway in Russia and many other Western nations, ample research¹³ has repudiated nativists’ arguments that these changes will result in “global catastrophe” (as WCF communications director Don Feder has warned).¹⁴ What drives right-wing concerns over Russia’s demographics are xenophobia and Islamophobia; as Russia’s overall population has plummeted, its indigenous Muslim population has grown—now comprising 21-23 million, or about 15% of Russia’s total population.¹⁵ Russia has also become an increasingly popular destination for immigrants and refugees. As of 2013, according to the U.N. Population Division, Russia was second only to the United States in its immigrant population—the two nations have 46 million and 11 million immigrants, respectively.¹⁶

Carlson's work on the "demographic winter" has proven to be particularly effective in garnering favor with Russia's conservative leadership. In Russia and other parts of Europe, a combination of population anxiety and growing anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant sentiment has offered WCF a favorable political context in which to advance its anti-abortion, "natural family" agenda.

What Antonov and Medkov meant by a “demographic winter” was that the qualities and characteristics of what it means to be Russian were in danger of being redefined as something other than White and Orthodox.¹⁷ Anxious to reassert whiteness and Russian Orthodox religious practice as fundamental qualities of Russianness, Antonov, Medkov, and Carlson’s team at the Howard Center determined that they needed to “use [their] talents and resources to create new coalitions to promote the natural family worldwide.”¹⁸

They convened the first World Congress of Families in Prague in March 1997. More than 700 delegates from 200 organizations across 43 nations gathered to forge a new interfaith alliance of conservative religious orthodoxies, including Russian Orthodox, LDS (Mormon), conservative Catholic, and conservative evangelical participants, as well as a few Orthodox Jews and Muslims.¹⁹

The WCF I convening produced more fear. A declaration published at its conclusion warned, “[C]ultural revolutions, materialism and sexual permissiveness have resulted in a destruction and denigration of moral values ... extra-marital relationships, adultery and divorce proliferate leading to widespread abortion, illegitimacy and single-parent children.”²⁰

The declaration specifically named “the United Nations, its N.G.O.s and agents” as key adversaries, claiming that the U.N. and its allies had “pursued dangerous philosophies and policies that require population control, limitation of family size, abortion on demand, sterilization of men and women and have sought to persuade Third World countries to adopt such policies.” It condemned policies that subvert “the legal and religious status of traditional marriage,” as well as those that promote contraception and abortion, “state welfare systems,” comprehensive sexual education, non-marital cohabitation, “homosexual unions,” and single parenting.²¹

This declaration constituted WCF’s opening salvo in what has become an extended campaign to interrupt trends toward more expansive human rights at the U.N. by recruiting, influencing, and emboldening conservative delegates. WCF’s project at the U.N. is to form a consolidated and increasingly powerful voting bloc prepared to take direction from U.S.-based right-wing leadership.

In May 1998, at a planning session for WCF II (its second international convening), a group of 25 religious leaders including evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, Mormons, Muslims, and Jews came together to define their common cause: protection and promotion of the “natural family.” From WCF’s planning documents:

The natural family is the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature, and centered around the voluntary union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage, for the purposes of:

- *satisfying the longings of the human heart to give and receive love;*
- *welcoming and ensuring the full physical and emotional development of children;*
- *sharing a home that serves as the center for social, educational, economic, and spiritual life;*
- *building strong bonds among the generations to pass on a way of life that has transcendent meaning;*
- *extending a hand of compassion to individuals and households whose circumstances fall short of these ideals.*²²

With this collection of principles, designed to appeal to the broadest possible “traditional values” audience, WCF positioned itself as an umbrella organization for groups and individuals around the world (whether Christian or not) committed to codifying highly restrictive criteria for who counts as “family,” and who does not. The policy statement identifies underpopulation as “the demographic problem facing the 21st Century,” promotes “the large family as a special social gift,” and regards “religious orthodoxy as the source of humane values and cultural progress.”

Well-known and well-funded American organizations such as Focus on the Family, Family Research Council, Alliance Defense Fund (now called Alliance Defending Freedom), Americans United for Life, and the National Organization for Marriage signed on as dues-paying partners, expanding WCF’s reach. (For all its influence, WCF remains small, with only five full-time employees and a modest budget—the Howard Center’s 2012 IRS filings reported total revenue of just \$523,870.²³)

WCF also has a regionally-based network of allies to spread its agenda: Theresa Okafor, director of the Foundation for African Cultural Heritage; in Mexico, Latino leaders such as Enrique Gomez Serrano, board president of Red Familia (Spanish for “Family Network”); and in Russia, Russian leaders such as Alexey Komov, director of external affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. These allies tailor WCF’s messages to resonate with local communities, packaging the “natural family” agenda in whatever way will most effectively hook their audience.

In Russia, for example, WCF manipulates deep-seated racial prejudices to mobilize demographic winter anxieties. In Africa, WCF exploits neocolonial concerns, arguing that racist Westerners are trying to abort Africa’s Black babies. All around the world, the “natural family” is a solution in search of a problem.

USING THE U.N.

The WCF considers the United Nations an adversary and has chosen to fight for its “natural family” agenda inside that institution. In a 1999 address to the World Family Policy Forum—an event organized by the now-closed World Family Policy Center and hosted at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah—Allan Carlson outlined his plans:

It is time to bring to the United Nations and to other international settings the shared truth of history ... It is time to move this view of the family as the fundamental social unit to the very heart of international deliberations, so that it might guide the creation of laws and public policies in our respective nations.

This focus on the U.N. was evident at the WCF II, convened in Geneva, Switzerland, in November 1999. During its opening plenary, Carlson noted that 51 years earlier, delegates to the newly formed U.N., meeting in the same hall, had approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Carlson emphasized the language used in Article 16, which declares, “The

family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.”²⁴

Carlson and WCF sought to co-opt the UDHR’s language into a public relations push for a restrictive U.N. definition of family that could then be used to assail women and LGBTQ people through the U.N. and other international organizations.²⁵

U.S. conservatives have long held suspicious, if not openly hostile, attitudes toward the United Nations. The “signature campaign” of the Far Right, anti-communist John Birch Society—launched in 1958—seeks to get the U.S. out of the United Nations. The JBS describes the institution as a “socialistic global government” controlled by “global power elites.”²⁶

Historically, hostility toward the U.N. often went hand-in-hand with Cold War-era opposition to Russia. Since the mid-90s, though, WCF and other elements of the U.S. Right have taken a different approach. Following advances made in the fight for abortion rights and other reproductive justice issues at the U.N.’s International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and in Beijing (1995), right-wing strategists began to see the U.N. as a key battleground. Writing in 2006, researcher Pam Chamberlain described a “flocking to the U.N.” in which “12 NGOs opposed to abortion or comprehensive sexuality education ... gained consultative status since the Cairo and Beijing U.N. conferences in 1994. All of them are associated with the U.S. Christian Right.”

At the same time, WCF developed an affinity for post-Soviet Russia, a country its leaders increasingly depict as a model of moral purity. Larry Jacobs, a strident opponent of abortion and LGBTQ rights, had joined WCF in 2003 as managing director.²⁷ At a WCF gathering in Melbourne in September 2014, Jacobssaid, “The Russians might be the Christian saviors to the world; at the U.N. they really are the ones standing up for these traditional values of family and faith.”²⁸

Jacobs was referring to the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC)’s June 2014 convening in Geneva. The council adopted the “Protection of the Family” resolution, a resolution requiring the Council to host a panel and produce a report on protecting families.²⁹ While the resolution itself (co-sponsored by WCF’s “natural family” friends from Russia) has no immediate policy implications, its potential precedent-setting language fails to acknowledge that—in the words of many progressive NGOs and delegates, “various forms of the family exist.” The UNHRC’s Russian-led conservative voting bloc saw to it that the more inclusive phrasing never made it into the resolution.³⁰

Ultimately, that same conservative voting bloc—including every African delegate on the Council (representing 12 of the 26 affirming voices)—passed the resolution.

Human rights advocates have expressed fear that the resulting panel and report will be used to further marginalize diverse family structures, such as those led by single parents, grandparents,

or LGBTQ people. Commenting on the resolution, Geneva Advocacy Director at Human Rights Watch Julie de Rivero said, “[I]t is a travesty for the U.N. to ignore [the] reality” that “families come in all shapes and forms. Insinuating that different types of families don’t exist can do nothing but harm the children and adults around the world who live in those families.”³¹

One of the primary leaders behind the “Protection of the Family” resolution was Sharon Slater, president of Family Watch International (FWI), chair of the U.N. Family Rights Caucus, and longtime member of WCF. Slater traces the beginning of her political activism to WCF II, held in Geneva, Switzerland in 1999. Slater writes that WCF “changed the direction of my life, as I learned about the assaults in almost every area of family life and was instilled with the hope that if we all worked together, we could effectively stop many of these attacks.”³²

The so-called “attacks” Slater refers to include comprehensive sex education curricula and policies to support condom distribution, access to abortion, and LGBTQ families.

Later that year, Slater co-founded FWI. Officially registered at the U.N. as Global Helping to Advance Women and Children (Global HAWC), FWI enjoys Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) consultative status and is thus able to participate in meetings on economic and social issues. Over the last 15 years, Slater has taken on increasingly prominent roles as a campaigner as a foil to human rights advocates—in the U.S. and internationally, including at the U.N., where she often collaborates with Carlson and other WCF affiliates.

FEAR OF A DARKER PLANET: FROM NATIVISM TO NATALISM

WCF’s influence at the U.N. relies heavily on its longstanding ties with Russia, one of the five permanent members on the U.N. Security Council. Carlson’s work on the “demographic winter”—the idea that abortion, birth control, homosexuality, feminism and other “unnatural” deviations have led to dangerous population decline and a crisis for the “natural family”—has proven to be particularly effective in garnering favor with Russia’s conservative leadership.

Carlson argues that declining birth rates threaten the decline of civilization—Western civilization. As researcher and journalist Kathryn Joyce puts it, “The concern is not a general lack of babies, but the cultural shifts that come when some populations, particularly immigrant communities, are feared to be out-procreating others.”³³ Put another way, the demographic winter thesis cultivates racism and xenophobia in support of exclusionary “natural family” policies. A main objective of the WCF’s demographic scare tactics is to convert nationalism into natalism, and thereby mobilize a larger anti-abortion, “natural family” base. (Natalism prioritizes human procreation, including public policies that reward birthing children.)

This perspective is commonplace among WCF and its affiliates. Following WCF’s 1997 congress in Prague, Cathy Ramey, associate director of the U.S. anti-abortion organization Advocates for Life Ministries, explained what she’d learned: “As native citizens reject marriage and child-bearing, other non-native groups will simply move in and replace the historic

population.”³⁴ Speaking at WCF V, John Mueller, a researcher at the Ethics and Public Policy Center—a neoconservative think tank in Washington, DC, argued that “fertility would rise and remain above the replacement rate, not only in the United States but also most other countries, by ending legal abortion.”³⁵

In Russia and other parts of Europe, a combination of population anxiety and growing anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant sentiment has offered WCF a favorable political context in which to advance its anti-abortion, “natural family” agenda. Carlson and his network have fanned the flames of “demographic winter” anxieties throughout the region.

In June 2011, WCF hosted the Moscow Demographic Summit, describing it as the “world’s first summit to address the international crisis of rapidly declining birthrates.”³⁶ More than 500 people attended, including Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church; Russian First Lady Svetlana Medvedeva; members of the Russian Duma; and a host of right-wing American scholars and activists.

Within two weeks of the event, President Medvedev—whose wife, Medvedeva, had recently teamed up with the Russian Orthodox Church on a new anti-abortion campaign—signed a law requiring abortion providers to devote 10 percent of any advertising to describing the dangers of abortion to a woman’s health, and making it illegal to describe abortion as a safe medical procedure.³⁷ This was the first new legislative restriction placed on abortions in the country since the fall of Communism.³⁸

Four months later, in October 2011, the Russian Duma passed a law further restricting abortions to within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, with exceptions for cases up to 22 weeks in instances of rape or medical necessity. The new law also tacked on a mandatory waiting period of two to seven days before an abortion can be performed, a common tactic used by anti-abortion activists in the U.S.

Russian leaders are by no means mere pawns in the Right’s “natural family” campaign. Referencing a book on family genealogy authored by Aleksandr Putin (a distant cousin of President Vladimir Putin) Russian journalist Vladimir Shvedov notes that extended families “are gradually returning to the consciousness of our much-suffering people,” because in Russia as in any country, “the greatness of the nation . . . is built upon the ancient foundation of the old families.”³⁹ The country’s post-Soviet identity crisis has thus provided fertile ground for the vigorous promotion of the “Russian family.”

Nonetheless, the U.S. Right’s influence on these Russian debates is unmistakable. In 2011, the New York Times noted that “contention over abortion [in Russia] has begun to sound like the debate in the United States.”⁴⁰ And when President Putin signed a law in December 2013 completely banning abortion advertising, Steven Mosher, president of the Population Research Institute and a regularly featured speaker at WCF events, was not the least bit shy about claiming credit: “PRI has played a role in helping to turn Russia back to life. I participated

in the first [WCF] Demographic Summit at the Russian State Social University in Moscow in May, 2011. We talked with senior Russian leaders about the need to protect life. Not long thereafter, a law was passed banning abortion of unborn babies older than 12 weeks.”⁴¹

Alexey Komov, WCF’s representative to Russia, agreed, calling the WCF’s Demographic Summit a “catalyst” for Russia’s anti-abortion movement. Komov, who organized the 2011 Moscow Demographic Summit, was subsequently appointed to a position with the Department for External Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, further strengthening WCF’s ties to Russian Orthodox leadership.⁴²

THE AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

In recent years, WCF has expanded its influence not only in Russia but also in Africa, where it works closely with public intellectuals and conservative leaders who act as spokespeople for WCF’s “natural family” campaign. Perhaps most prominent is Theresa Okafor, a leading anti-choice advocate in Nigeria and the recipient of WCF’s 2014 Natural Family Woman of the Year award.

In Africa, debates over sexual health and rights are frequently tied to issues related to population. Development economists generally agree that for economic growth in Africa to continue in such a way that poverty rates decrease, birthrates must drop significantly.⁴³ U.N. reports indicate that population growth in Africa is so high that the continent’s population is expected to more than triple by 2100, rising from 1.2 billion to 4.2 billion ⁴⁴—a daunting forecast for a continent that also has the highest poverty rate in the world. (In Okafor’s native Nigeria, more than 60 percent of the population lives in absolute poverty—up from 54.7 percent in 2004.⁴⁵) Okafor, however, denies the need for comprehensive sex education, contraception, and access to safe abortions. She instead argues that Africa needs to rid itself of the “negative cultures” being imposed on it from the West.

Speaking at the World Public Forum Dialogue of Civilizations in 2012 (described by a local news outlet as “the first pro-family conference in Africa.”), Okafor explained her view—that poverty in Africa is the result of corrupt governments, poor resource management and distribution, and “the sinister agenda to downsize and control Africa.” According to Okafor, as Europeans face falling birthrates, they feel “threatened” by Africa’s growing population and economy and thus seek to promote contraception and abortion among Africans.⁴⁶

Okafor’s statements contrast sharply with demographic winter ideas that Carlson and WCF promote in Europe, Australia, the U.S., and elsewhere. This highlights WCF’s cynical manipulation of racial resentments within different political contexts. In Russia, WCF points to declining White birthrates and growing numbers of immigrants, Muslims, and people of color to stoke White fears of decreasing dominance over non-White and non-Christian minorities. In Nigeria, WCF plays to neocolonial resentments, suggesting that Western nations are seeking to restrict the growth and prosperity of African nations by “downsizing” Black African populations

through increased access to abortion and contraception and the “promotion” of homosexuality. Whether rhetorically aligned with European racism or African nationalism, WCF’s solution remains constant: it offers its “natural family” campaign, knowing full well that what follows may include restricted reproductive rights and criminalization or persecution of LGBTQ people.

As Political Research Associates’ Rev. Dr. Kapya Kaoma has documented, the U.S. Religious Right has a long history of promoting anti-choice, anti-LGBTQ “pro-family” ideologies in Africa (at the expense of African women and LGBTQ people).⁴⁷ But WCF was one of the first to package its agenda in a UN-ready, policy-friendly format. The expansion of this campaign from local and regional levels to the international realm represents a grave threat to LGBTQ and reproductive justice globally.

Speaking at WCF IV in Madrid in 2012, Okafor noted that many of the recent anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ gains made in Nigeria are thanks to networking coordinated by WCF. She specifically named Sharon Slater’s FWI as being “instrumental to many of the victories we celebrate.”⁴⁸ (Such “victories” include the repeal of a 2012 reproductive rights law in Nigeria’s Imo State, the enactment of a requirement that all condom packages include warnings indicating that they are not “100% safe,” and the passage of a bill criminalizing same-sex marriage.)

According to Okafor, the Global Family Policy Forum for U.N. delegates hosted by WCF-affiliate FWI in Gilbert, Arizona, in 2011 was of particular importance, noting that it was there that the African voting bloc—which unanimously voted against adding more inclusive language to the definition of “family” used in the UN’s newly adopted “Protection of the Family” resolution—successfully “consolidated their positions.”

Where WCF has been successful in persuading national governments to adopt its “natural family” model, there has followed increased persecution of LGBTQ people and decreased access to abortion and reproductive healthcare. In African countries that accept Okafor’s WCF-endorsed narrative and political agenda, we may see growing levels of poverty and—thanks to further restrictions on comprehensive sex education and healthcare options—increased risk for transmission of HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

BRINGING THE FIGHT BACK HOME

Although it is based in the U.S. and has an entirely White, American board of directors, WCF has held its previous global convenings outside the U.S. But WCF IX is scheduled for October 27-30, 2015 in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Sutherland Institute, a right-wing think tank based in Salt Lake City (whose acting CEO and prominent right-wing philanthropist, Stanford Swim, sits on WCF’s board of directors) will host the event, which is expected to draw about 3,000 people.

The theme of WCF IX is expected to be “religious liberty,” which the U.S. Religious Right has been endeavoring to redefine as a sanction to discriminate in the public sphere (particularly against women and LGBTQ people).⁴⁹ U.S. Christian Right groups have been testing similar

“religious freedom” strategies overseas. WCF, as an umbrella organization for right-wing groups, is seeking to orchestrate the coordinated proliferation of this strategy internationally. Many of its member organizations, including the Alliance Defending Freedom and FWI will be in attendance. ADF announced in October 2014 that it is “in the process of transitioning into an international religious liberties organization.” The announcement added that ADF will soon be establishing advocacy offices in: Strasbourg, France, focusing on the European Commission on Human Rights; Geneva, focusing on the United Nations Human Rights Commission; and Brussels, focusing on the European Union.⁵⁰

If WCF IX goes forward as planned, those who support LGBTQ rights and reproductive justice may see a surge of new legislative assaults, at home and around the world. Yet the event also provides a unique opportunity to challenge WCF's “natural family” campaign right where it started, in the U.S.

Depending on the audience, WCF’s strategy for promoting the “natural family” varies, but the impact of its campaign is the same across the globe: increased persecution of LGBTQ people, further restrictions on access to abortion, and an increasingly exclusionary definition of what kind of families deserve recognition and rights. With its far-reaching influence, streamlined structure, and ability to alter its message quickly, WCF is establishing itself as a vanguard for the Right’s global anti-choice and anti-LGBTQ agendas.

WCF IX provides a venue for WCF and other Christian Right leaders to continue expanding their international influence. If WCF IX goes forward as planned in Salt Lake City, those who support LGBTQ rights and reproductive justice may see a surge of new legislative assaults, at home and around the world.

However, the event also provides a unique opportunity for activists to challenge the expanding influence of WCF’s “natural family” campaign right where it started, here in the U.S. “Keep in mind that the work of WCF is in response to positive legal gains made by the sexual and reproductive rights and LGBTQ communities,” said Kane. “There is ample room for human rights defenders to challenge the WCF’s regressive agenda.” Activists who support reproductive justice and LGBTQ rights should use this opportunity to draw the public’s attention to the real policy agenda that this supposedly “pro-family” network is pushing.

L. Cole Parke is PRA's LGBTQ & Gender Justice Researcher, and has been working at the intersections of faith, gender, and sexuality as an activist, organizer, and scholar for the past ten years. Raised in a military family and a conservative Christian world, Cole studied theology at Texas Lutheran University, earned their Master's in Conflict Transformation at Eastern Mennonite University's Center for Justice & Peacebuilding, and traveled throughout the country advocating for LGBTQ justice at conservative religious schools and institutions as a part of the 2008 and 2012 Soulforce Equality Rides.

ENDNOTES

1. Stan Swim, “World Congress of Families does not spread fear,” Salt Lake Tribune, Nov. 9. 2014, <http://www.sltrib.com/opinion/1793725-155/family-wcf-families-congress-law-munson>
2. Jennifer Butler, “For Faith and Family: Christian Right Advocacy at the United Nations,” The Public Eye, Summer

- 2000, <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2000/09/01/for-faith-and-family-christian-right-advocacy-at-the-united-nations/#>.
3. Kathryn Joyce, "Missing: The 'Right' Children," *Nation*, Feb. 14, 2008, <http://www.thenation.com/article/missing-right-babies>.
 4. In August 2014, the Human Rights Campaign—America's largest LGBTQ political advocacy group—published a report describing WCF as "one of the most influential American organizations in the export of hate." See: "New HRC Report Exposes The World Congress of Families," Aug. 25, 2014, <http://www.hrc.org/blog/entry/exposed-the-world-congress-of-families>.
 5. "Hunted: The War Against Gays in Russia," http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/hunted-the-war-against-gays-in-russia#.
 6. Benjamin Bidder, "Viral Vigilantism: Russian Neo-Nazis Take Gay Bashing Online," *Spiegel Online International*, Nov. 14, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/russian-skinheads-abuse-gays-and-post-video-to-social-networks-a-933549.html>.
 7. Austin Ruse, "World Congress of Families Pledges Solidarity with Europe," *Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute*, <http://t.c-fam.org/en/issues/marriage-and-family/553-world-congress-of-families-pledges-solidarity-with-europe>.
 8. In 2014, plans were well underway for WCF's next major convening—WCF VIII—to be held in Moscow, September 10-12. In March, however, WCF announced that it was canceling the event purportedly due to concerns over Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. But the event actually went ahead as scheduled, only slightly disguised by the use of a different name: "Large Families and the Future of Humanity International Forum" (held on the exact dates that WCF VIII was originally scheduled).
 9. John Ballyntyne, "A third way? Allan Carlson's vision of a family-centered economy," *News Weekly*, Nov. 8, 2005, <http://newsweekly.com.au/article.php?id=3576>.
 10. "John A. Howard Ph.D.," http://profam.org/people/xthc_jah.htm.
 11. Allan Carlson, "On the World Congress of Families: Presentation to the Charismatic Leaders Fellowship Jacksonville, Florida," Jan. 12, 2005, <http://profam.org/docs/acc/thc.acc.020112.wcf.htm>.
 12. According to Devin Burghart, vice president of the Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights, "Demographic winter is a relatively new phrase that describes the old alarmist 'birth dearth' concept—the idea that we're facing declining birthrates which is supposed to portend all sorts of cataclysmic events." See Bill Berkowitz, "Right-Wing Groups Use Decline of White Birthrates to Stoke Fear of Homosexuality, Feminism and Abortion," *AlterNet*, June 29, 2010, http://www.alternet.org/story/147352/right-wing_groups_use_decline_of_white_birthrates_to_stoke_fear_of_homosexuality_feminism_and_abortion.
 13. Nancy Folbre, "The Underpopulation Bomb," *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 2013, <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/11/the-underpopulation-bomb>.
 14. Don Feder, "The Cultural Roots of Demographic Winter," *Rhodes Forum*, <http://rhodesforum.org/popular/4082-the-cultural-roots-of-demographic-winter>.
 15. "Russia's Growing Muslim Population," *Stratfor*, Aug. 8, 2013, <http://www.stratfor.com/image/russias-growing-muslim-population>.
 16. See: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/wallchart/index.shtml>.
 17. Kathryn Joyce, "Review: Demographic Winter: The Decline of the Human Family," *The Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Spring 2008), <http://kathrynjoyce.com/articles/review-demographic-winter-the-decline-of-the-human-family/>.
 18. "Frequently Asked Questions," *The Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society*, Jan. 9, 2007, http://profam.org/THC/xthc_faq.htm.
 19. Jennifer Butler, "For Faith and Family."

20. "A Declaration From The World Congress of Families To The Governments of the Globe," The Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society, Mar. 22, 1997, http://worldcongress.org/WCF1/wcf1_declaration.htm.
21. "A Declaration From The World Congress of Families."
22. Allan Carlson, "On the World Congress of Families."
23. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service, Form 990, (Washington, DC: 2012), <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2013/541/788/2013-541788267-0a1444bd-9.pdf>.
24. "World Congress of Families," The Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society, http://profam.org/docs/acc/thc_acc_frc.christian.democracy.htm.
25. In contrast to WCF's anti-LGBTQ definition of family, Amnesty International argues that Article 16 of the UDHR—which also states, "Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution."—can be interpreted as a prohibition against discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation. See: "Marriage Equality," Amnesty International, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/lgbt-rights/marriage-equality>.
26. "United Nations," John Birch Society, <http://www.jbs.org/issues-pages/united-nations>.
27. Prior to joining the WCF staff, Jacobs served as president of Healthy Beginnings, a conservative Christian pregnancy center with an explicit anti-choice agenda targeting "disadvantaged young women ... experiencing unplanned pregnancies." During his tenure there, Jacobs told a local newspaper that his dream was to spread the Healthy Beginnings model nationally, using faith-based grants made available under President Bush's administration. Instead, WCF has given Jacobs the opportunity to spread his anti-choice agenda globally. See: Peter Bronson, "Angels in Lab Coats," *Enquirer*, Aug. 19, 2001, http://enquirer.com/editions/2001/08/19/loc_bronson_angels_in.html.
28. Brian Tashman, "World Congress of Families Praises Russian Laws 'Preventing' Gays from 'Corrupting Children,'" *Right Wing Watch*, June 3, 2013, <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/world-congress-families-praises-russian-laws-preventing-gays-corrupting-children>.
29. J.Lester Feder, "U.N. Human Rights Council Adopts Resolution On 'Protection Of The Family,'" *BuzzFeed*, June 26, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/un-human-rights-council-adopts-resolution-on-protection-of-t#.vqye5d3N9>.
30. Jay Michaelson, "At the United Nations, It's Human Rights, Putin-Style," *Daily Beast*, June 26, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/26/at-the-united-nations-it-s-human-rights-putin-style.html>.
31. J.Lester Feder, "U.N. Human Rights Council."
32. Sharon Slater, "The Family Watch," Apr. 2, 2012, <http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/newsletter/0573.cfm>.
33. Kathryn Joyce, "Missing: The 'Right' Children."
34. Cathy Ramey, "A World Views Conference: Prague's international Congress of the Family focuses on cultural disaster," *Life Advocate*, May/June 1997, http://www.lifeadvocate.org/5_97/cover_s.htm.
35. John D. Mueller, "How do nations choose 'demographic winter'? Is America doing so?" Remarks to The World Congress of Families V, Panel on "Family and Demography", Amsterdam, Netherlands, Aug. 11, 2009, accessible via <http://worldcongress.org/wcf5.spkrs/wcf5.mueller.htm>.
36. World Congress of Families News, Jan./Feb. 2012, Vol. 6 No. 1, <http://worldcongress.org/wcfnl/wcfnl.cur.pdf>.
37. Sophia Kishkovsky, "Russia Enacts Law Opposing Abortion," *New York Times*, July 16, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/15/world/europe/15iht-russia15.html>.
38. "Russia Passes First Anti-abortion Law," *SIECUS*, July 2011, <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&featureid=2018&pageid=483&parentid=478>.
39. Paul Goble, "Putin Family Values," *The Interpreter*, Apr. 17, 2014, <http://www.interpretermag.com/putin-family-values/>.

40. Sophia Kishkovsky, "Russia Enacts Law Opposing Abortion."
41. Steven Mosher, "Russia Considers Banning Abortions as Abortion Decimates Its Population," Life News, Dec. 23, 2013, <http://www.lifenews.com/2013/12/23/russia-considers-banning-abortions-as-abortion-decimates-its-population/>.
42. World Congress of Families News, Jan./Feb. 2012.
43. See, for example: Steven W. Sinding, "Population, Poverty and Economic Development," Jan. 2008, http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/04.07.09/Population_Poverty_and_Econ_Dev_Sinding.pdf.
44. "World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision," United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>.
45. "Nigerians living in poverty rise to nearly 61%," BBC, Feb. 13, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17015873>. According to UNESCO, "Absolute poverty measures poverty in relation to the amount of money needed to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter." See: "Poverty," UNESCO, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/poverty/>.
46. "Theresa Okafor: Looking to the Future: Overpopulation or Global Depopulation," YouTube, Dec. 19, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Lp7-D2u6qk>.
47. Rev. Dr. Kapyra Kaoma, *American Culture Warriors in Africa: A Guide to the Exporters of Homophobia and Sexism* (Cambridge: Harvard Bookstore, 2014).
48. "WCF VI-Madrid 2012-Conquistas del movimiento provida y profamilia en el mundo. Theresa Okafor," YouTube, July 10, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGS12eVZq1Y>.
49. Jay Michaelson, *Redefining Religious Liberty: The Covert Campaign Against Civil Rights*, Political Research Associates, Mar. 2013, <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2013/03/21/redefining-religious-liberty-the-covert-campaign-against-civil-rights/>.
50. World Congress of Families News, Nov. 2014, Vol. 8 No. 7, http://worldcongress.org/files/9414/1582/4595/WCF_News_November_2014.pdf.