

Speech of Katalin Novák, the President of Hungary at the Budapest Demographic Summit

Your Holiness and Eminence, Cardinal and Archbishop, Your Excellencies! Rabbi!

Madam and Mr Presidents and Prime Ministers!

Distinguished Conference!

I have had the privilege to invite and welcome you five times now. At the beginning, I did so as State Secretary for Families, later as Minister, and now, I am welcoming you to the 5th Demographic Summit as President of Hungary.

I thank the children representing the Reformed Church of Transcarpathia and their choirmaster for bringing us a piece of the inner freedom with which they live their lives despite the desperate situation.

I promise, we promise them: we will not give up. Neither the church, nor the school!

Distinguished Participants!

I have found that it is a good thing to incorporate personal experiences into our work for families.

I have lived in (the same) marriage for twenty-one years. We have three children. I often give thanks for them, and for my parents who have been actively present in our lives to this day. And I also thank fate that through my husband, I can feel the family he comes from to be my own, too. At this point, let me welcome my husband's mother (I use the word mother-in-law with caution), who does not like to be in the limelight, but is here with us, and is celebrating a jubilee birthday today. Happy birthday, Marika!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The Budapest Demographic Summit is all about freedom.

I belong to the generation who are the heirs of the system changers. When thirty-three years ago, in 1990, we regained our freedom, I was still a child. But the thirteen years spent under a Communist dictatorship, then softening already, left inerasable marks. The rejection of all forms of oppression became an instinct in us.

We have grown so used to the scent of freedom, that today we cannot imagine our life without it.

We are the heirs of freedom fighters. Through their lives, we have learned: Hungarians do not simply get freedom, we must fight for it over and over again.

Today as well, we are fighting for freedom – the freedom of families.

Anyone who has children is ready to fight at any time for their children to live in peace and freedom.

Anyone bringing up children knows that real freedom only exists within a well-defined framework.

Anyone who lives in a family understands that freedom is the key to security.

I am a mother of three children. I gave birth in 2004, 2006 and 2008. Those were anti-family times.

Home-ownership subsidies were abolished, the time parents could spend at home with their children was shortened, the financial burden on families increased. The sense of security we have started to grow accustomed to evaporated.

Fewer and fewer people had the courage to enter the bond of marriage, and childbearing plummeted to a historic low.

Some might have thought that the cause of Hungarian families and thus of the Hungarian nation has been lost. But Hungarian families refused to stand for this. They waged a fight for freedom. They stood up for a secure future. Civil movements were started, family organisations were formed. The Population Roundtable was established.

Hungarian families have successfully turned Hungary into a country where human life is valued. Where mothers and fathers bringing up children in a responsible manner earn respect. Where the elderly are appreciated. Where young people are free to decide how they wish to live their lives, and if they decide to have a family, they will get all possible assistance to do so. A country where families with children are not worse off financially than those who decide not to have a family of their own.

The freedom fight launched by families has not been in vain. Hungary implemented a pro-family policy shift. In ten years, the marriage rate doubled and the abortion rate halved. Divorce rates started to decline, in Europe, childbearing increased the most in Hungary, the number of large families and the living standard of families began to increase.

But the freedom fight of families has not come to an end. As in bringing up children, the milestones follow one another and new challenges keep arising, so families are ready to fight again and again when they feel their future is at risk.

And the future is at risk!

The demographic winter which has afflicted the developed world is now turning into an Ice Age. And while alarm bells are being sounded about climate change, little attention is paid to the real and irreversible change in the world. If childlessness becomes widespread, if fewer children continue to be born each year than the number of those who pass away, our beloved world that we assumed to be secure will wither away. Without children, there is no future. Also, it only makes sense to take care of the Earth if we have children and grandchildren to pass it on to.

To make matters worse, the demographic Ice Age is approaching while we are increasingly defenceless. The supportive pillars of our life, the foundations of our Christian culture are cracking and crumbling, and if we fail to protect the values we have thought inviolable, we will annihilate ourselves before we become the victims of the approaching Ice Age.

But freedom-fighting families will not stand for this! They do not give up the church and the school! They will reclaim everything that belong to families. They will take back the celebrations, the symbols, the stolen words, the times and the spaces that are rightfully theirs, as well as the legal principles, truths and cultural values which have been mocked and downtrodden by the spirit of the age.

We are here today as allies for each other and for families.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The Biblical number 12 has played an important role in the history of Hungarian freedom-fights as well. I say this to our foreign guests that 175 years ago, in 1848, during the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, our heroes compiled their demands in a list of 12 points. This list has remained the iron law of Hungarian freedom.

The freedom fight of Hungarian families has identified at least twelve fundamental points as well. Demands that – if implemented in a sustainable way – can form the bedrock of pro-family policies.

Therefore, what do Hungarian families wish for?

May there be peace, freedom and accord.

1. We want freedom to parent! Parents have the right, responsibility and duty to bring up their children. There is no place for any ideology here.
2. We will not let our children be deprived of their sense of security predicated on their identity. Those born as girls should be allowed to grow up as girls, and boys as boys.
3. Pro-family decision-makers! Do not provoke resentment against families! Let pro-family policies be a national common denominator!
4. Advocacy for Hungarian families at home as well as abroad! Hungary should not give its consent to anti-family decisions!
5. Security for families! Keep our kindergartens, schools, villages, towns, country and borders safe. Let us continue to live without having to be anxious about our children and our ageing parents!
6. Adequate opportunities for people with children! Let those who have children be no worse off than those who voluntarily decide not to have them! Childbearing should not become a risk of poverty!
7. Let us remove the financial obstacles to the birth of the children their parents desire to have! Families should be able to have as many children they want, when they want to have them!
8. Appreciation for the elderly! Our parents and grandparents worked hard to make Hungary prosper. Let's recognise their achievements in the family and the community! Let us strengthen the alliance, rather than the differences, between generations!
9. Real freedom of choice for women! No mother should have to give up having children because of work, or work because of having children! Proper appreciation for full-time mothers!
10. Let us protect the security of an own home! Let us help young people to home ownership!
11. Competitive public education, vocational training and higher education, modern health protection! Let us stand up for those who live in more difficult circumstances than average!
12. Attention for Hungarian families beyond our borders! Wherever a child is born, whether in the mother country or across our borders, we care equally!

Equality, liberty, fraternity!

Today, the freedom fight of families is on. There is no question that our place is also under the flag of families. The presence of our high-ranking friends, allies and respected scientists from abroad gives us hope that we are not alone. The pro-family alliance extends to the whole world. I count on all of you in this fight for freedom, for which we offer our alliance.

God bless families!