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2015

PNCI networked through multiple avenues in 2015 including by updated postings on the PNCI website, a monthly E-News, updates and alerts, personal email and postings on five different international google groups comprised of legislators, staff, clergy, and pro-life NGO leaders, and phone calls. Catholic legal experts were among PNCI's contacts including Jane Adolphe and Ligia De Jesus from Ave Maria School of Law, Paolo Carozza from Notre Dame Law School and Carter Snead from the Notre Center for Ethics and Culture, Theresa Collette from St Thomas Law School, Helen Alvare from George Mason Law School, and Richard Stith from Valparaiso Law School.

PNCI initiated group action to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) after discovering that it was holding an open submission period to receive statements relating to its General Comment No. 36. on Article 6 (Right to Life) of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Over 30 pro-life groups from the United States, Europe and Latin America submitted statements urging the committee to resist pressure to treat unborn children as "an exception" to the right to life, highlighted the damaging physical and psychological effects abortion has on women, raised concern for the ethical issues surrounding fertility treatments and frozen embryos, expressed concern for the discrimination of sex selective abortion and denial of a baby girl's right to life, and opposed the eugenic practice that eliminates children in the womb with disabilities.

PNCI discovered that Ipas had targeted Malawi's pro-life law and was working closely with a small number of parliamentarians on a Termination of Pregnancy Act. **PNCI took action** networking with the Culture of Life Africa and two lawmakers from the International Catholic Lawmakers Network (ICLN) to arrange a pro-life presentation to MPs. 71 parliamentarians attended the pro-life forum with many making strong pro-life commitments and inspiring them to learn more about abortion so they can better defend their pro-life position.

PNCI responded to requests for pro-life legislation and information—including from contacts in the European Parliament— suggesting various types of legislation and connecting individuals with pro-life law and policy organizations in the U.S.

PNCI organized a parliamentarians' letter, signed by over 400 pro-life lawmakers globally, objecting to targets in the sustainable development goals (SDGs) that advance access to abortion.

PNCI joined pro-life organizations working at the UN in a lobby effort objecting to targets to "ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services" and 5.6 to "ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights" and also met with and strategized with Nigerian Ambassador Sarki, with the Holy See delegation, country delegates, and an organization of Muslim women on how to best protect life and family.

Marie Smith **met personally** with Archbishop Azua, nuncio to the UN in New York, and members of his staff, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Ireland's Permanent Representative to the United Nations—co-chair of the SDGs—Ambassador USarki from Nigeria, and a number of other country representatives or delegates to the United Nations and addressed members of the Africa Group on concerns about the promotion of abortion in the SDGs. In addition, Marie Smith wrote submission statements for PFL that expressed pro-life perspectives for select UN meetings.

Parliamentary Network for Critical Issues (PNCI)

Year End Review 2015

PNCI is a project of Gospel of Life Ministries, Inc

PARLIAMENTARY NETWORK FOR CRITICAL ISSUES (PNCI)

Summary

Marie Smith is the Director of the Parliamentary Network for Critical Issues (PNCI), which falls under the umbrella of Gospel of Life Ministries. PNCI networks with elected, religious, and pro-life leaders globally to advance a culture of life and encourages parliamentarians to build sustainable pro-life caucuses.

In 2015 PNCI continued to share global news related to life issues, recommended best pro-life practices to save the lives of mothers and preborn children from abortion, including model laws and policies that restrict, regulate, and reduce abortion, and alerted contacts to pro-abortion tactics suggesting counter measures and joint actions.

PNCI maintains close collaboration with parliamentarians, staff and NGOs in the U.S. and Canada and at the European Parliament, Council of Europe, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and monitors actions affecting respect for life at the United Nations and Organization of American States.

Mrs. Smith assisted the Holy See at the United Nations in New York by serving as an expert on women's issues and human rights and as a member of the Holy See delegation to the Conference on Population and Development. Marie Smith helped to represent Priests for Life along with International Director Bob Lalonde and wrote submission statements for select UN meetings using the opportunity to promote respect for the right to life and human dignity for all, from conception to natural death.

PNCI is a recognized source for global pro-life news with its articles appearing in 2015 on pro-life and religious news sites including Zenit, Catholic New Agency, Lifenews, and news by the National Right to Life Committee.

2015 Highlights

Networking to advance respect for life

PNCI networked through multiple avenues in 2015 including by updated postings on its website, a monthly E-News, email blasts with updates and alerts, personal email, phone calls, and postings on five different international google groups comprised of legislators, staff, clergy, and pro-life NGO leaders. Catholic legal experts were among PNCI's contacts including Jane Adolphe and Ligia De Jesus from Ave Maria School of Law, Paolo Carozza from Notre Dame Law School, Carter Snead from the Notre Center for Ethics and Culture, Theresa Collette from St Thomas Law School, Helen Alvare from George Mason Law School, and Richard Stith from Valparaiso Law School. Policy organizations collaborating with PNCI included the Knights of Columbus, Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), Americans United for Life (AUL), and the Bioethics Defense Fund (BDF).

PNCI networked with pro-life organizations in the U.S and around the world and with pro-life

parliamentarians, including Members of the U.S. Congress, to discuss international pro-life concerns and participated in strategy meetings of NGOs including the UN pro-life coalition and the newly formed Political Network for Values.

In order to more effectively outreach to Africa, PNCI began a close collaboration with the founder of Culture of Life Africa Obianuju Ekeocha (Uju) and arranged through Christiaan Alting von Geusau for her to present on pro-life challenges in Africa to the summer meeting of the International Catholic Lawmakers Network (ICLN). This collaboration resulted in a parliamentarians' pro-life forum in Malawi that interrupted the advance of a bill to legalize abortion.

A highlight from 2015 was when PNCI initiated group action to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) after discovering that it was holding an open submission period to receive statements relating to its General Comment No. 36. on Article 6 (Right to Life) of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The HRC is considering omitting the unborn from the "right to life" article.

Over 30 pro-life groups from the United States, Europe and Latin America submitted statements urging the committee to not treat unborn children as "an exception" to the right to life, highlighting the damaging physical and psychological effects abortion has on women, expressing concern for the discrimination of sex selective abortion and denial of a baby girl's right to life, and opposing the eugenic practice that eliminates children in the womb with disabilities.

PNCI Director Marie Smith submitted a statement for Priests for Life (PFL) recommending that General Comment No.36 affirm a non-discriminatory application of the right to life that applies to all members of the human family stating that the right to life is the foundation of human rights and extends to all individuals from conception to natural death, concluding that no one ought to arbitrarily be denied their right to life. The HRC will issue the final General Comment in October 2016. PNCI will continue to monitor and recommend further action.

Discovering and disrupting pro-abortion tactics and plans

PNCI continued to monitor key pro-abortion websites, tweets, blogs, and news outlets to uncover the latest pro-abortion tactics and plans and engage in counter measures including by alerting contacts in targeted countries or regions, connecting with new contacts and suggesting counter measures.

In 2015 PNCI focused attention on Ipas, an NGO that performs abortions, lobbies for abortion legalization, and trains health personnel in abortion techniques and previously marketed its signature hand held suction abortion device, the manual vacuum aspirator (MVA).

IPAS has been implementing a plan that targets women lawmakers and convinces them that legalization of abortion is needed to reduce maternal mortality. The women then introduce legislation to overturn existing pro-life laws. Sierra Leone legalized abortion following this strategy which is also being attempted in Malawi with the Termination of Pregnancy Act.

PNCI discovered Ipas' plans in Malawi and was worked closely with the Culture of Life Africa to present a successful pro-life forum for parliamentarians. 71 legislators attended the forum with many making strong pro-life commitments and inspiring them to learn more

about abortion so they can better defend their pro-life position. PNCI will continue to work to help defeat the abortion bill in Malawi in 2016.

Sharing best pro life practices and actions

PNCI acts as a resource for pro-life legislation and information. PNCI shares news and information on the passage of pro-life laws and policies that will inspire and motivate lawmakers to use their positions to protect the right to life from conception to natural death.

In 2015, it responded to requests for pro-life legislation and information—including from contacts in the European Parliament, the UK, and Canada— suggesting various types of legislation depending on the need and connecting individuals with pro-life policy organizations in the U.S.

The response by the U.S. House of Representatives to the videos exposing the illegal sale of aborted baby body parts by Planned Parenthood was shared with the network which motivated legislators in a number of countries to call for investigations into their national Planned Parenthood affiliates.

Questions on the selling of aborted baby body parts extended to the European Parliament where questions were asked about the role of the larger International Planned Parenthood Federation's European Network. MEP Miroslav Mikolášik filed an inquiry asking if the European Commission "is aware" of the investigations being conducted in the U.S. regarding the involvement of Planned Parenthood abortion clinics in the illegal trafficking of aborted baby parts and whether or not the Commission will suspend funding to the Planned Parenthood network until U.S authorities have completed their investigations.

In the Republic of Ireland, Independent TD Mattie McGrath called on the Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) to distance itself from its affiliation with International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

PNCI shared with its network "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" by the U.S. bishops in the belief that it would encourage lawmakers to stand firm and continue to work to stop abortion and would strengthen their "heroic commitment" to "oppose laws and policies that violate life and dignity at any stage from conception to natural death."

In 2015, as in past years, PNCI relayed the news about actions by pro-lifers across the globe to mark the Day of the Unborn Child, March 25th, with marches, forums, Masses and various events celebrating the sanctity of life.

Jane Adolphe, consultant to the Vatican Secretariat of State, is networking with PNCI on content for a new website to help share information on international and regional bodies more effectively.

United Nations

Countering pro-abortion pressure at the United Nations

The United Nations (UN) is fraught with controversy among Member States and UN agencies over attempts to promote access to abortion in countries which protect women and children from the violence of abortion.

This debate was most evident as the world adopted an ambitious plan in "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" - <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> - with 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets with indicators to be finalized in March, 2016.

These new "Global Goals" are meant for all countries and for all people and purport to "leave no one behind" but PNCI joined pro-life organizations in objecting to two targets which have the potential to increase global access to abortion as a component of "sexual and reproductive health and rights" as stated in target 3.7-- *"ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services"*-- and 5.6-- *"ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights"*.

Marie Smith attended personal meetings with the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Ireland's Permanent Representative to the United Nations—co-chair of the SDGs—Ambassador Usman Sarki from Nigeria, and a number of other country representatives or delegates to the United Nations and addressed members of the Africa Group on concerns about the promotion of abortion in the SDGs.

She met with Archbishop Azua, nuncio to the UN in New York, and members of his staff to strategize on pro-life efforts.

PNCI initiated actions with its network to voice opposition to these targets. A parliamentarians' letter was signed by over 400 pro-life lawmakers and given to various UN officials and Permanent Representatives.

PNCI kept contacts at the European Union informed of related actions by the European Commission at the UN who in turn worked to influence the actions of the Commission in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Marie Smith addressed members of the Africa Group on concerns about targets to "Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services" and "Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights".

She worked extensively on the lobby effort, strategizing with Nigerian Ambassador Sarki, with the Holy See, with friendly delegates, with an organization of Muslim women, and with pro-life NGOs.

These efforts will continue in 2016 as the indicators for the targets will be finalized in March.

PNCI also tracks the actions of treaty monitoring bodies at the UN and informs the network. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 contained language giving the "local and national legislative process" the ability to determine national laws and policy on abortion but in 2015 select treaty monitoring bodies chose to instruct countries that they needed to change laws on abortion.

PNCI reported on these “recommendations” and reminded lawmakers that these “instructions” are not binding and that the duty to form policy on abortion belongs to those serving in national office. The following information was shared:

- The United Nations' treaty monitoring body for the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) told Chile, Ireland, Uganda and Venezuela to enact new legislation on abortion and adopt new guidelines on abortion to broaden access to abortion in each respective country.
- The Human Rights Committee (HRC) during its 144th session monitoring country compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights used the review period criticize pro-life laws, policies and actions in Spain, Venezuela, Northern Ireland, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- The committee for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) told Russia, Slovakia, Portugal, Malawi, Timor -Leste, and United Arab Emirates that they must remove various laws and policies restricting abortion germane to each country, including regulations for mandatory counseling, parental consent, and waiting periods.

PNCI has also reported on the growing networking of so-called “human rights experts” who hold positions at the United Nations (UN), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to call for increased access to abortion. These officials urged governments “to consider diligently the discriminatory and public health effects of laws which criminalize abortion in all circumstances, to remove punitive measures for women who undergo abortion, and at the very minimum, legalize abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the woman or the life of the woman.”

PNCI will continue to monitor and report on pro-abortion actions and coordination while strategizing on counter measures in 2016.

PFL Presence at the UN

In 2015 Marie Smith served as a women’s issues and human rights expert for the Holy See and on the Holy See delegation to the Commission on Population and Development.

Priests for Life as a recognized NGO with Special Consultative Status at the UN participated in major meetings represented by International Director Bob Lalonde and Marie Smith. NGO status gives PFL’s representatives access to the UN and UN diplomats where they offer support for the positions expressed by the Holy See, network with members of the UN pro-life coalition, and lobby delegates against language that advances access to abortion.

Following Pope Francis’ address to the United Nations, PFL spread the pope’s message linking concern for nature with concern for the vulnerable: “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities...it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected”.

PFL by use of handouts countered the efforts of pro-abortion NGOs who sought to include additional references to “reproductive health services” and “reproductive rights” in the new sustainable development goals.

In addition, Marie Smith, as a Special Representative to the UN for PFL wrote submission statements that expressed pro-life perspectives for select UN meetings in 2015.

In a written statement to the 53rd Session of the Commission for Social Development on the theme "Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world" PFL affirmed that no member of the family should be stripped of his or her human dignity and denied his or her most basic right — the right to life— through policies that treat the individual as a problem and not as part of the solution to social development. The Priests for Life appeared on the UN website in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Arabic.

The 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was organized around the theme of global progress for women since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, was reminded by PFL that preborn baby girls continue to be killed in the most extreme act of discrimination— sex selection abortion—and explained that the lives of all newly created individuals, regardless of sex, deserve respect, protection and non-discrimination." The Priests for Life statement was posted in English, Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese and Arabic on the CSW website.

During the 48th Session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), the PFL statement was one of twenty NGO statements highlighted on the CPD website, one of only two pro-life statements with over 10 pro-abortion statements. PFL addressed the post 2015 theme of the meeting, "Realizing the Future We Want" stating: "The future we want is one in which every human life is valued for his or her innate worth and no member of the human family is stripped of human dignity and denied the most basic right — the right to life — through policies that allow individuals to be marginalized and treated as a problem, rather than as potential contributors to poverty eradication."

As stated previously, through the leadership of Marie Smith, thirty pro-life statements were submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) in response to its call for submissions on Article 6, "Right to life", of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which states: *"Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life."*

This pro-life action countered that of pro-abortion activists serving on the HRC and pro-abortion organizations, including Amnesty International and the Center for Reproductive Rights, who are seeking the disenfranchisement of unborn children proposing that they be considered an "exception" and be denied a "right to life."

The PFL statement included a warning, *"Selective exclusion of the "right to life" for any member of the human family impacts the right to life of all by bestowing an arbitrary status to an inalienable right that is dependent on the subjective views of others rendering the unborn child's right to life contingent on whether or not she is "wanted" by another, considered "worthy of life", or deemed "perfect" enough."*

The six page PFL statement was posted on the HRC website.

PNCI will continue such actions in 2016.

Helping to build a pro-life lobby in Africa

PNCI increased its outreach to Africa in 2015. Through networking with the Culture of Life Africa founder, Obianuju Ekeocha (Uju) and through contacts at the UN, PNCI increased its activities to assist African countries.

Uju provided entry and contacts to Episcopal conferences in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Malawi where she has organized pro-life conferences and forums designed to invite "every member of our human society to the noble service of constantly and courageously defending the sanctity of human life, marriage and family."

Coordination with Uju will increase in 2016 as the pressure on African countries to legalize abortion intensifies. The December 8th passage of the bill to legalize abortion on demand for the first trimester in Sierra Leone was a warning that pro-life laws in other countries may soon fall.

Africa is a top target of pro-abortion activists who are following a long term strategy that began with the passage of the African regional treaty, Maputo Protocol, the only treaty in the world that recognizes a "right to abortion" in select circumstances. The abortion language of the treaty was written by Equality Now and went into effect in 2003.

In 2015, Ipas worked with officials at the African Commission—which oversees countries' compliance with the Maputo Protocol— wrote the General Comment for the African Commission on the abortion article of the Maputo Protocol as part of an effort to force African countries that have ratified the Maputo Protocol to overturn laws on abortion claiming such action is needed to ensure compliance with the abortion provision, Article 14, of the treaty.

PNCI exposed the work of Ipas and its African Alliance and will increase its efforts in 2016 to reveal pro-abortion NGO tactics and strategies in Africa and share the information with African bishops, lawmakers, and other like-minded individuals.

Stopping the advance of abortion at the Organization of American States (OAS)

PNCI continued to monitor the actions of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights, and its associated offices, the Commission on Women (CIM), and the General Assembly on actions taken to promote abortion as a human right, as a reproductive right, and as necessary to end violence against women or to reduce maternal deaths.

PNCI networked with pro-life leaders from Latin American Alliance for the Family, Focus on the Family, Alliance Defense Fund, Human Life International, and Population Research Institute to promote the pro-life view at the OAS and to counter the push for abortion as a human right and as needed to reduce maternal deaths.

As a result of new pro-life networking, the pro-life lobby at the OAS is growing in strength and numbers as more pro-life and pro-family organizations are joining the effort. This comes at a critical time as the newly elected OAS Secretary General, Luis Almagro, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, has stated his support for overturning laws against abortion throughout the OAS region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The debate over the legalization of abortion at the OAS is expected to increase in 2016. Plans are underway for the Gospel of Life to apply for NGO status so it can be better positioned to work to stop the advance of abortion.