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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b): Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

Statement submitted by Priests for Life, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ [E/CN.9/2018/1](#).

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

Priests for Life works to ensure that human dignity and the fundamental right to life for all are respected during all stages of life from conception to natural death. The movement of people, whether by choice, conflict or crisis, requires global commitment to ensure that safety, human dignity and human rights are protected at all times during transit, receiving, relocation, or return to the home country.

Dignity of the human person

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledged that “no one will be left behind” and recognized that “the dignity of the human person is fundamental”. Its vision of the world includes “a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed”.

This noble concept for the world is one which Priests for Life believes needs to guide discussion and action in regard to sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration. The movement of individuals, families and communities varies by motivation but the desire for safety, security and improved well-being are universal. The challenges for the global community to provide not just for their immediate basic needs but to ensure a future that allows individuals and families to not only survive but to thrive requires unprecedented agreement and action that always respects human dignity and the right to life of all.

Universal respect for human rights and human dignity does not allow subjective opinions to determine whose life is worth living and whose life should be protected from acts of violence and exploitation. All human beings deserve protection and respect during all stages of life from conception to natural death.

Respect for the right to life

Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 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”. The many challenges presented by international migration have at their core the need to protect the right to life.

Respect for the right to life of all is most urgent as transportation methods for migration and exodus from conflict and crisis can be treacherous and deadly as the world has tragically witnessed.

The intrinsic dignity of life is the foundation of human rights. Life is not just for the privileged, the perfect and the planned, but extends to all members of the human family during all stages of life, including children alive but not yet born.

Protecting children

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by heads of state and governments and high representatives affirms that during responses to large movements of refugees and migrants the “human rights and fundamental freedoms of all refugee and migrant children” will be protected and that “regardless of their status” States will give primary “consideration at all times to the best interests of the child”.

Member States also affirmed that they will “comply with our obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child”. Article 2 of the Convention instructs State Parties to “respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status”.

Priests for Life observes that the Convention on the Rights of the Child reminds us in the Preamble that “... the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth”.

Protection of children before birth is practiced by a majority of Member states that restrict access to abortion. Abortion negates a child’s right to life and is clearly not in “the best interest of the child” as governments promised in the New York Declaration.

Priests for Life believes that the rights of every child residing in a country, whether a citizen or not, should be respected regardless of his or her stage of development, nationality or the migration status of her or his mother.

Protection of the family

The need to protect the family and enable it to function as the core foundation of society is critical during movements of people. It is through the family that basic needs of food, water, shelter and clothing are most often provided. Equally important, the family provides the love, care and nurturing that uplifts its members helping them to endure and survive the difficulties and trials of migration. The family shares religious beliefs which give hope to its members during difficulty.

When the family is disrupted, individual members suffer, especially its most vulnerable members. The separation of children from their family and unescorted minors require special attention to reunite families and to ensure that children are protected from neglect and abuse, especially from the scourge of human trafficking, during the separation.

Providing health care

Access to life-affirming health care is needed by all, especially the most vulnerable — pregnant women, children, the elderly and the disabled. Initiatives that seek the elimination of individuals who may be considered “inconvenient” or a “burden” or who require extra care must always be opposed.

Priest for Life believes that no individual member of the family ought to be selectively marked as expendable — regardless of disability, disease, age, condition of dependency or stage of development. All members of the family are deserving of protection.

Women and girls in migration need measures to ensure their safety and to meet their unique needs. Pregnant women and girls require access to prenatal care, nutritious food, assisted childbirth and postnatal care to reduce mortality and to promote the health and well-being of both.

The New Urban Agenda adopted by the General Assembly commits in paragraph 55 to “health-care services, including universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services to reduce newborn child and maternal mortality”.

Priests for Life is concerned that the provision of health care to reduce newborn, child and maternal mortality could be changed by inclusion of access to abortion —

an act that leads to the mortality of children during their most vulnerable stage — and opposes attempts to include access to abortion in maternal or reproductive health programmes.

Faith-based organizations are often among the first to meet the needs of those struggling in transit, including in the provision of health care. Their core belief in the sanctity of life and opposition to abortion must be respected and protected if abortion is included as a component of “sexual and reproductive health-care services” for women and girls who are migrants or refugees.

Conclusion

Priests for Life believes that respect for the right to life is the foundation of human rights and affirms that respect for the intrinsic dignity and worth of every human being through all stages of life from conception to natural death ought to be the justification for policies and programmes developed to respond to mass movements of people. At all times, the human dignity of every human being must be upheld, despite migration or immigration status.
