

Fifty second Session of the Commission for Social Development: "Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all"

## **Statement**

Policies that empower people to achieve poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all contribute significantly to sustainable development and must be based on the dignity and intrinsic value of every human being. It was recognized in the Declaration on the Right to Development (A/Res/41/128) "...that the human person is the central subject of the development process and that development policy should therefore make the human being the main participant and beneficiary of development."

Our commitment to human rights springs from our commitment to the protection, affirmation, and defense of all human beings – those born and those residing in the womb— as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Child explicitly remind us. Priests for Life affirms that respect for the dignity and worth of every human life, without exception, is the foundation for policies and programs that free countries, and most importantly people, from poverty. All individuals have the potential to make significant contributions to the eradication of poverty; no life is expendable.

## **Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication**

"The proportion of people living in extreme poverty declined by half at the global level" according to the *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015 Fact Sheet* on Goal #1, yet "one in eight worldwide" is still suffering from hunger." Women in particular are affected by a lack of nutritious food. Their lives, and the lives of their children, suffer the effects of malnutrition.

Malnutrition is the underlying cause of death for at least 3.1 million children a year and is responsible for 45% of all deaths among children under the age of five. More than 800,000 babies—one in four newborns—die each year because they are born too soon or too small as a result of poor maternal nutrition.

Malnutrition leads to stunted growth of children. Stunted children become adults who suffer from diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease, conditions that not only result in poor health but often impede earning capacity and result in lower incomes. Of particular concern, women affected by stunting give birth to children who are also likely to be afflicted by this preventable condition, perpetuating the cycle of malnutrition and poverty.

Adequate nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life— from conception to the second birthday—saves the lives of women and children and improves the prosperity of a country.

A new and incisive series of reports by Lancet, *Maternal and Child Nutrition*, issues an urgent plea to governments to make nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life, and for all women of child-bearing age, the center of the new development goals.

As stated in the Lancet report *Maternal and child nutrition: building momentum for impact*, "The new evidence provided in the Maternal and Child Nutrition Series strengthens the case for a continued focus on the first 1,000 days. Investments within this window can help meet crucial goals: the prevention of undernutrition, overweight, and poor child development outcomes with longlasting effects on human capital formation."

This unique "window of opportunity" affects the life and health of the preborn child for her or his lifetime while also improving the mother's health. Adequate nutrition for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and all women and adolescent girls of child-bearing age needs to be prioritized in food policies, for the sake of women, children, and nations.

National governments through the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, endorsed by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, are taking action to ensure that the right policies are in place to implement programs to improve nutrition for women. If women of child-bearing age are well-nourished they are healthier and able to provide nourishment for the child in the womb to ensure healthy physical and cognitive development. Healthy children thrive and are empowered to become healthy adults who are better equipped to make meaningful contributions to their families and society and contribute to the eradication of poverty.

## **Social integration**

The lack of nutrition and food security not only adversely affects women and adolescent girls preventing their ability to experience full social integration and threatening their overall health, but impacts future generations, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. The Lancet report, *Only collective action will end undernutrition*, emphasizes the importance of preparing adolescents and women of reproductive age for pregnancy and places this urgency at the center of the post 2015 agenda:

*We are in a race against time to eradicate the global scourge of undernutrition. Undernutrition cripples global economic growth and development, and future global prosperity and security are intimately linked with our ability to respond adequately to this urgent challenge. Its results stunt the physical growth and life chances of millions of people, and for Africa and Asia estimates suggest that up to 11% of national economic productivity is lost to undernutrition.*

*Women and girls are at the heart of this message. As the bearers and carers of children, their health and economic potential is entwined with that of future generations. Unless girls grow well in early childhood and adolescence and enter into motherhood well nourished, are lent support during pregnancy, protected from*

*heavy physical labour, and empowered to breastfeed and provide good food for their babies and toddlers, the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition will not be broken.*

True social integration precludes any member of the family being treated unfairly or selectively marked as expendable— regardless of sex, age, race, disability, disease, condition of dependency or stage of development. All members of the family are deserving of durable protections, including those who have been classified as expendable by some and excluded from basic social protection. No member of the family should be stripped of their human dignity and denied their most basic right—the right to life.

Children in developing countries especially should be valued for their innate human dignity and human potential and not treated as expendable in population control programs. Children identified with a disability in the womb need to be welcomed at birth and provided with the best medical care available. As children mature their lives need protection, especially as a growing number face challenges brought on by developmental problems such as autism.

Adults with disabilities are deserving of support and assistance, including provisions to secure employment. The lives of aging individuals increasingly need policies that provide for their care as the intergenerational balance of the family has severely shifted resulting in fewer family caregivers.

States need to protect the family and enable it to function as the core foundation of society. When the family is disrupted and devalued, individual members suffer greatly, voiding the goal of development to assist the individual. It is our duty to protect and provide for all members of the family through sustainable policies to eradicate poverty.

## **Conclusion**

Authentic development empowers all members of the family in policies and programs and supports the family when it is suffering from economic and social hardship and deprivation. The Declaration on Development declares “...the human being is the main participant and beneficiary of development”. Social development policies ought not to allow any member of the family to be selectively marked as expendable.

All members of the family are deserving of protection, including those that have been excluded from basic social protection. No member of the family ought to be stripped of their human dignity and denied their most basic right—the right to life—through policies to end poverty and provide empowerment.

Governments need to make nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life—from conception to the second birthday— and for all women of child-bearing age and adolescent girls, the center of development policies. Such a focus not only saves the lives of women

and children but helps to empower children for a healthier, productive life, contributing to the prosperity of a country as adults.

The human rights of all members of the human family—without exception—were recognized in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the right to life for everyone. Fundamental respect for human life—and human rights—cannot be negotiable or contingent on age, sex, race, disability, wantedness, condition of dependency or stage of development.

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, including preborn children. Policies to eradicate poverty must recognize the potential of all individuals to help solve the problem of poverty and not treat people as the problem.