



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to  
achieve sustainable development for all**

### **Statement submitted by Priests for Life, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all must “ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment”, as declared in “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. (A/RES/70/1)

Priests for Life believes that the “world we want” is one in which every human life is valued for his or her innate worth and that the dignity of each and every human being is the foundation of policies that liberate countries and, most importantly, people from poverty.

One of the most critical ways to alleviate poverty is to alleviate hunger and malnutrition as expressed in Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger — End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Healthy individuals and healthy families are equipped with the stamina necessary for productive and sustainable agriculture, to attend school, to learn improved farming methods, to receive training in job skills, and to enjoy improved health and well-being and better enabled to resist illness and disease.

Malnutrition impedes progress and affects the economic potential of families, communities and countries especially when associated with stunted growth. Malnutrition results in the stunted growth of 165 million children resulting in impaired physical and cognitive development with lasting detriment to the individual and to the economic health of countries.

Great attention needs to be focused on the greatest window of opportunity for improving health for a lifetime by ensuring nutrition during the critical first 1,000 day window from conception to the second birthday. This unique period of development in an individual’s lifetime affects his or her life and health for their lifetime while contributing to the overall economic health of their country. The right nutritious food and vital nutrients like iron, Vitamin A and folic acid given to adolescents and women of childbearing age, pregnant women and children under age two results in dramatic decreases in child mortality and malnutrition.

Malnutrition and stunted growth are associated with reduced school attendance and poor academic performance and stunted children are more vulnerable to infectious disease having an increased risk of dying from pneumonia, diarrhea and malaria. Stunted children become adults who are more overweight and suffer from chronic disease including diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease and are unable to make economic contributions. Women affected by stunting deliver babies who are also likely to be afflicted by this preventable condition, perpetuating the cycle of malnutrition and poverty.

Malnutrition contributes significantly to maternal and child mortality while women who are well-nourished are more likely to survive pregnancy and childbirth and give birth to healthy newborns who survive and thrive, grow into boys and girls with the physical and cognitive health needed to attend school and grow into adults who contribute to the economic health of their countries.

Healthy reproduction also reduces the mortality of mothers and helps to enable mothers to learn about nutritious food choices for their children so they are enabled to as adults help reduce poverty.

Sustainable development policies to eradicate poverty need to recognise the potential of all individuals to help solve the problem of poverty and not treat any human being as a problem. Regrettably, far too often the reverse is the operative policy, and in the name of “development” groups of people are considered expendable.

This is most apparent in the case of abortion where population control and reproductive health programs often target the elimination of preborn children conflicting with the Convention on the Rights of the Child which 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.”

Access to abortion, whether in the context of “reproductive health” or “reproductive rights”, or as a component of population control, does not have universal support and is not a universally recognised human right. No treaty at the United Nations even includes a so-called “right to abortion”.

The sovereign laws of United Nations Member States vary in regards to recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings ranging from constitutional protection of life from the moment of conception to allowing abortion on demand until the moment of birth.

All children, beginning at conception, should be valued for their innate human dignity and human potential and not treated as expendable. No member of the family ought to be stripped of his or her human dignity and denied his or her most basic right — the right to life — by subjective views that her or his life is “inconvenient” and therefore “disposable”.

Priests for Life believe that all human beings have potential to make significant contributions to eradicating poverty. Authentic sustainable development, if it is truly to “leave no one behind” as promised in the 2030 Agenda, ought not to allow any human being to be selectively marked as expendable during any stage of development from conception to natural death.

Strategies for the eradication of poverty should not strip any member of the human family of human dignity, marginalise them or treat them as a problem, rather than as a potential contributor to sustainable development.

Pope Francis in his address to the United Nations General Assembly called for respect of all lives and stated, “The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic.”

Priests for Life concurs that our common home rises on the foundations that understand universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life. We believe that poverty eradication policies ought to affirm the well-being, dignity and worth of all — every human life without exception — leading to a post 2030 world in which “no one was left behind”.