



Priests for Life

Submission to the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review

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Priests for Life Submission

Introduction and Summary

1. Priests for Life (PFL), an NGO with ECOSOC status, seeks to advance respect for the innate worth and dignity of every human being regardless of disability, disease, age, race, sex, condition of dependency or stage of development and believes that no one ought to be selectively marked as expendable. Priests for Life believes that all members of the human family are deserving of protection, including those that have been subjectively classified as expendable and 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 its various ministries Priests for Life works to promote the right to life of unborn children, help post abortive women find healing after their abortion, give post abortive women an opportunity to express their abortion regret, and raise awareness of the harm abortion has inflicted on the African American community.

2. Priests for Life supports the work of the United States (U.S.) that seeks to counter the reinterpretation of international law advancing a so-called international right to abortion, fund life-affirming health care in its foreign aid, protect the right of sovereign nations and US states to determine laws on abortion, and reduce the number of lives lost through abortion. This submission also raises concern for the exceedingly high abortion rate among African American women in comparison to other groups of women based on race.

International Legal Framework

3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out a vision that begins “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. There is no exception that rights only begin at birth; the child alive in the womb but not yet born is a celebrated member of families around the world. An overwhelming majority of countries restrict or prohibit the intentional death of an unborn child. At the United Nations, the United States has advocated for the respect of countries’ sovereignty and on behalf of their right to protect cherished family members in the womb as it has also done through its foreign assistance policies.

4. The U.S has ratified the International Covenant on Civil Political Rights (ICCPR) which “recognizes and protects the right to life of all human beings” in Article 6 and asserts that the right to life “is most precious for its own sake as a right that inheres in every human being, but it also constitutes a fundamental right”. It affirms “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life”, and that “The right to life is a right which should not be interpreted narrowly”. Actions by the U.S. to reduce abortion and protect preborn children comport with the commonly understood terms of the treaty to protect the right to life regardless of the new interpretation of Article 6.

5. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination has also been ratified by the U.S. The Convention resolves to “adopt all necessary measures for speedily eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations.” The disproportionately high abortion rate among African American women is a troubling concern for

the U.S. The latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 40% of all abortions in the U.S. are by African American women while the African American population is 13% of the total U.S. population.ⁱ The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted in a past observation the high abortion rate among African American women.ⁱⁱ

U.S. Support for Human Rights and Sovereignty at the United Nations

6. Statements delivered by U.S. officials and representatives at the United Nations affirm the dignity and worth of every human being. President Trump told the General Assembly in September, 2019: “Like many nations here today, we in America believe that every child — born and unborn — is a sacred gift from God” and “Americans will also never tire of defending innocent life.”ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar delivered a statement on behalf of twenty countries during the High Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, September 23, 2019, which highlighted the disruptive use of undefined terms advanced during negotiations. The statement included,

“We do not support references to ambiguous terms and expressions, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights in U.N. documents, because they can undermine the critical role of the family and promote practices, like abortion, in circumstances that do not enjoy international consensus and which can be misinterpreted by U.N. agencies.

“Such terms do not adequately take into account the key role of the family in health and education, nor the sovereign right of nations to implement health policies according to their national context. There is no international right to an abortion and these terms should not be used to promote pro-abortion policies and measures.”

Policies Protecting the Right to Life and Sovereignty

7. Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA) is a laudable U.S. foreign policy that seeks to provide life-affirming health care, including critical prenatal care and assisted childbirth, to women in least developed countries. The block on U.S. funding to international organizations that perform or promote abortion demonstrates U.S. respect for the sovereign right of countries to determine their own laws on abortion, as stipulated in the ICPD Programme of Action, and to prevent U.S. funds from being used for pro-abortion activism that seeks to overturn sovereign laws restricting abortion. Criticism of this policy is undeserved and appears driven in large part by abortion activist organizations denied funding under the policy.

8. The U.S. Congress has enacted policies regulating foreign assistance since abortion was legalized in 1973. These policies include measures to protect against coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization, prevent abortion being used as a method of family planning, and the use of U.S. funds to lobby for or against abortion. These reasonable measures respect sovereignty and include the Helms Amendment (1973), Siljander Amendment (1981) and Kemp-Kasten Amendment (1985)

Abortion is not Health Care

9. The U.S. recognizes that authentic health care does not end the life of a patient. Thanks to the advances of science and technology, the humanity of the unborn baby can no longer be denied as she or he is increasingly treated for medical conditions while still in utero. Ultrasound imaging provides a window to the womb so all can clearly see the baby's heart beating, fingers and toes, and active movement.

10. Abortion is not only violence against children but can cause harm to their mothers. Women have suffered physical, psychological or emotional consequences from abortion. Priests for Life's post abortive healing ministry, Rachel's Vineyard, holds a thousand retreats every year in over 70 countries helping thousands of women and men make peace with themselves and others and come to a deeper understanding of God's love and mercy. Similarly, its Silent No More Awareness Campaign provides post-abortive women and men with the chance to interact with people who care about them, many who also regret their abortions. Together they share their abortion testimonies publicly and privately with the hope of touching hearts and educating others about the emotional, physical and spiritual harm of abortion with the goal of persuading society that women in an unexpected or difficult pregnancy deserve help, not abortion.

State Laws Protecting the Right to Life of Most Vulnerable Unborn Children

11. Abortion is a highly contentious issue in the U.S. where over 60 million abortions have taken place since legalization in 1973.^{iv} A number of states have taken action to tighten laws on abortion. Of particular concern is the disproportionate number of abortions that occur among African American women. According to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, non-Hispanic black women had the highest abortion ratio in the U.S. (390 abortions per 1,000 live births) compared to non-Hispanic white women who had the lowest abortion ratio (111 abortions per 1,000 live births).^v A number of states with high rates of abortion among non-Hispanic black women have taken action to reduce the abortion rate and save the lives of African American children including Georgia where 66% of abortions are by African American women.

12. A number of states have sought to end discriminatory abortions based on the sex or disability of the child. In the case of sex selective abortion, ending the life of the girl child in the womb because she is female is an act of gender based violence. While this practice is most common outside the U.S. there is growing concern that it is taking place within the U.S. Abortion based on the condition of the unborn child discriminates against the so-called imperfect, especially babies identified as having Down syndrome. 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.

Recommendations for Action

13. Continue to promote respect for the right to life from its very beginning regardless of sex, race, or condition of dependency or disability at the United Nations and other international venues. Support the efforts of states seeking to end these discriminatory abortion practices.

14. Analyze the reasons for the high abortion rate among African American women with the goal of reducing it, including by providing women with the resources they need.

15. Ensure that foreign aid is providing life-affirming health care to reduce maternal and newborn mortality and stillbirth while providing for the needs of pregnant women and their children so they not only survive pregnancy and childbirth but thrive.

16. Verify that USAID'S Healthy Beginnings is working effectively to provide women of child-bearing age with the health care, nutrition and supplements they need to ensure maternal and child health during the critical first 1000 days of life from conception to the second birthday in order to prevent malnutrition and reduce disease.

ⁱ [Abortion Surveillance - United States, 2015](#). Table 13. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Vol 67, No SS-13; 1-45. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, November 23, 2018.

ⁱⁱ Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination UNITED STATES OF AMERICA CERD/C/USA/CO/6 8 May 2008 <https://undocs.org/CERD/C/USA/CO/6>

ⁱⁱⁱ Remarks by President Trump to the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Issued on: September 25, 2019 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-74th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>

^{iv} Number of Abortions, Abortion Counters <http://www.numberofabortions.com/>

^v Ibid, footnote 1