

Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-seventh session

Priority theme:

**Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls**

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

The priority theme of the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW— **Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls**—is critically important as violence against women is counter to women's innate dignity and diminishes the whole of humanity.

**Violence against girls and women must be eliminated and prevented throughout the life cycle.** Currently, 200 million women and girls are missing from the world today, victims of violence that devalues the lives of women and often results from cultural preferences for boys. Many of these "missing" girls were killed as a result of sex selection abortion; others were the victims of violent acts that targeted girls and women.

Sustainable elimination of violence against women and girls must begin where the violence begins—in the womb. Sex selection abortion is the ultimate act of discrimination against girls—a baby girl is identified in utero and her life ended simply because she is a baby girl. This violence based solely on the fact that she is a girl

marks the beginning of gendercide or femicide. It is not surprising that three most dangerous words in the world are “It’s a girl.”

Violence against girls must not be allowed by any one for any reason, including by the mother who wants to give birth to a son but is pregnant with a girl. There must be a consistent respect for the lives of girls and women throughout the life cycle--beginning with the right to life. Sex selection abortion considers the lives of the youngest of females to be without worth or value. Sex selection abortion is gender based violence against the most defenseless of girls.

**The girl child needs to be recognized as having value, worth and a right to life from the first moment of her existence.** Life is a continuum; at no point does her life suddenly receive value if not right from the start at fertilization. In the years after birth, she needs to be protected from all forms of violence and abuse and given the same opportunities as boys. She should be able to attend school without fearing that she will be assaulted or collect firewood or water without fear of violence. She should have access to health care and a nutritious diet.

**There are clear linkages between violence against women and their unique procreative capacity.** This is strikingly manifested in the origins of sex selection abortion and in the high level of violence directed at pregnant women

Mara Hvistendahl, author of the book Unnatural Selection, traces sex selection abortion back to population control efforts, which sought to reduce the number of girls born thereby reducing the number of future mothers and future children. This

discriminatory strategy has resulted in the staggering destruction of preborn baby girls and the high number of missing women today. It also contributed to the problematic view held by far too many that the lives of girls and women are expendable and do not have equal value with the lives of boys and men.

The consequences of sex selection abortion are skewed birth ratios especially in China and India, which have led to increased violence against women. Sex trafficking has increased, women are kidnapped and sold as brides, young girls are forced into prostitution, and few caregivers are available for aging populations, particularly impacting elderly women, who in their final years, are subjected to abuse and neglect.

Another manifestation of the linkage between violence against women and their procreative capacity is the violence of sterilization campaigns under the guise of population control. The selective physical assault on women's reproduction through sterilization demonstrates the horror of the discriminatory belief that women are somehow "flawed" due to their ability to bear children. This "flaw" needs to be "fixed" via the destruction or dismantling of that which makes them female and able to conceive and give birth.

**Such violence will only end when women are accepted and valued for their procreative abilities, and not discriminated against and subjected to violence because of it.**

This violence is revealed most cruelly in the practice of forced abortion.

Forced abortion is most evident in China where it is used as a tool to ensure compliance with the strict birth limitation policy that forbids more than one child to many couples and allows childbirth only with a state birth permit. Women are routinely subjected to government supported violence of forced abortion when they are found to be in violation of the birth policy, often in the last stage of pregnancy. Forced abortion inflicts unspeakable physical violence on Chinese women who fight for the lives of their children against state agents who drag them screaming and resisting to the abortion clinic while inflicting physical, verbal and emotional abuse upon the powerless women.

The trauma of forced abortion impacts their lives with horrific physical violence and inflicts psychological and emotional harm. Forced abortion is a violent crime that was classified as torture by the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal. Forced abortion in China must be condemned and stopped.

The linkage between violence against women and their procreative capacity is also revealed through coerced abortion. Far too many pregnant women are threatened by husbands, boyfriends, or other family members to have an abortion while the women refuse to do so. In the United States, evidence is growing on the number of women who have been forced, coerced, and pressured into having an abortion. Some have been slapped, punched and threatened, including with deadly weapons, until they consent to the abortion. Others who refuse to abort their child have been assaulted and subjected to violence directed at killing the child in the womb or at killing the woman and her child.

Coerced abortion and the accompanying violence must be stopped to spare women violence and abuse. Women deserve better than abortion.

Abortion by its very nature is an act of violence directed at the preborn child, but it also harms, exploits and degrades women.

**Violence against girls and women must be prevented and eliminated throughout a woman's life.** Preborn baby girls should not die because they are girls. True equality for girls with boys begins when both are welcomed in the womb and at birth and protected in law. Women need to be valued as equals to men and recognized and respected for their unique capacity to bear children and give birth. Their lives should be free of violence and they should be assisted in their critical role of mothers. The future of each and every country depends on healthy women and girls.