



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### **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

Priests for Life believes that the elimination of violence against women and girls for achieving gender equality and empowerment must be consistent throughout a girl's life beginning at the earliest stage.

Imbalanced sex ratios at birth in a number of countries demonstrate that the lives of girls are not valued in the prenatal stage of life and is a sign of lethal gender inequality that gives rise to increased violence against women and girls throughout their lives and hinders empowerment.

Advances in the empowerment of all women and girls need to recognize and act to end this first act of gender-based violence. Priests for Life is deeply concerned that twenty-six years after adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action there a global failure to recognize the innate value of girls in the womb.

The Beijing Platform for Action opposed the practice of prenatal sex selection in paragraph 38 stating "Discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life and must therefore be addressed from then onwards". The failure to act to end sex selection termination results in a lack of respect for the value of girls and impacts women and girls throughout their lives.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized prenatal sex selection as a severe form of discrimination and violence against girls that begins at the earliest stages of life and continues unabated throughout their lives. The Beijing Platform specified that prenatal sex selection is not only an act of violence against women but is violence against the girl child in the womb. Furthermore, it called on governments to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and the root causes of son preference. It recognized that discrimination against girls and boy child preference are harmful and result in unethical practices such as prenatal sex selection and female infanticide.

Yet, prenatal sex selection continues without a concerted effort to stop it. At times failure to act is related to cultural son preference and at times it is related to the abortion agenda which opposes restrictions on abortion for any reason, including those based on the sex of the child.

Failure to protect girls in law from prenatal sex selection as recommended to governments in paragraph 283d of the Platform, "Enact and enforce legislation protecting girls from all forms of violence, including female infanticide and prenatal sex selection", begins the devaluation which perpetuates throughout the life cycle and renders the worth of a girl contingent upon subjective views of wantedness and utility. The girl child becomes a commodity, devoid of innate dignity and value, significantly impacting equality and empowerment while leading to increased violence against women and girls.

Research and data from the countries most affected by sex selection, India and China, and the resulting imbalanced sex ratios, demonstrate the disturbing outcome from the large number of missing girls and women due to sex selection abortion—increased acts of violence against surviving women and girls.

Increases in kidnappings, rapes, sex trafficking and prostitution, bride-selling, and child marriage can be seen in countries with imbalanced birth ratios and large number of missing women and girls.

Unless concerted action is taken to stop lethal prenatal sex discrimination, sex imbalances at birth are not only expected to continue but to rise compounded by access to prenatal sex determination testing kits and access to drugs for self-induced prenatal sex selection abortion. Demographers warn, in *Missing Girls: A Globalizing*

Issue, that the systemic elimination of girls before their birth is the most extreme symptom of women's contemporary undervaluation.

The identification of a girl in the womb followed by her termination is the beginning of pernicious gender-based violence that perpetuates a girl's life. This discrimination not only denies millions of girls their basic equal right to existence and grossly undermines women's empowerment but its continued prevalence is a global failure to protect the most vulnerable girls from the most lethal form of discrimination—sex selection abortion.

Targeted research, *Population Sex Ratios and Violence against Women: The Long Run Consequences of Sex Selection in India*, demonstrates that male-biased population sex ratios generate violence against women in India and reveals that violence against girls and women has increased at such rate that it is now the fastest growing crime category. Recent sex crimes data demonstrates that states in India with the highest distorted sex ratio at birth have the highest rates of sexual assault against underage girls.

Demographic forecasts in *Missing Girls: A Globalizing Issue* warn that the systemic elimination of girls before their birth and the imbalanced sex ratios that follow will continue with dire consequences and the worldwide number of missing women from 2010-2050 will rise for two more decades before peaking at 150 million in 2035.

*Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current Trends, Consequences and Policy Implications* by United Nations Population Fund also warns that the situation for women and girls is likely to further deteriorate in some regions of the world in the years to come and that present-day sex ratios at birth are going to have a lasting impact on population dynamics in Asia. Projections show that in China and India, men will already vastly outnumber women of marriageable age for over two generations. Marriage estimates also alarmingly suggest that the number of single men trying to marry after 2030 might exceed for several decades the corresponding number of unmarried women by 50-60% in both countries.

The projected socio-economic consequences of these trends affecting women's and girls' equality and empowerment are alarming including potential risks for increased human rights violations such as abduction, trafficking and sale of women and girls for the purposes of marriage or sexual exploitation.

Warnings about the impact of sex selection abortion and distorted birth ratios that result must be heeded. Unless concerted action is taken to stop lethal prenatal sex discrimination, sex imbalances at birth are not only expected to continue but to rise compounded by access to prenatal sex determination testing kits and access to drugs for self-induced prenatal sex selection abortion.

Tragically, there has been insufficient progress to stop this first act of violence against girls. Anti-girl child discrimination also results in the killing of infant girls through infanticide or abandonment. The three most dangerous words in the world continue to be "It's a girl".

Priests for Life calls on the Commission for the Status of Women to urgently act to end prenatal sex selection abortion recognized in the Beijing Platform for Action as an unethical act of violence and discrimination against women and girls that begins the cycle of violence that impacts women and girls throughout their lives.