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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: Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Priests for Life (PFL) advocates for strategies that respect human dignity in seeking to eradicate poverty and hunger in all its forms to achieve the 2030 Agenda and for an inclusive recovery from COVID-19.

Well-being and dignity for all – every human life without exception – form the foundation of policies and programs that liberate countries and, most importantly, people from poverty and hunger, and ensure an inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19.

Priests for Life is concerned that progress is lacking on Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, and especially on target 2.2.1 on ending all forms of malnutrition. The World Health Organization estimates that malnutrition is the underlying cause of 3.1 million child deaths each year and leads to lasting damage for millions of other children.

During the 60th session of the Commission for Social Development, attention must be given to reducing the large number of children who are malnourished and to meeting their nutrition needs, right from the start at conception, and to meeting the nutritional needs of women and girls of reproductive age.

Malnutrition during the critical window of the first 1,000 days of life from conception to the second birthday is the most damaging and can impact a child for her or his lifetime. Malnutrition not only leads to deficiencies, stunting, being underweight, and wasting but can permanently impact a child's physical and cognitive capabilities. Nutrition for women and girls of reproductive age is essential for the health of both mother and child. Malnutrition during pregnancy contributes to the preterm delivery, low birthweight, and stillbirth.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations warns in *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021* that the world is not on track to achieve targets for any of the nutrition indicators by 2030 and that the current rate of progress is insufficient especially on reducing child stunting and low birthweight, on preventing anemia in women, and on the negative impacts on the ability of a mother to nurse her child. It shows that an additional 60 million people have been affected by hunger since 2014 and there are still about 144 million children under the age of 5 who suffer from stunting.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021 reports that one in seven live births, or 20.5 million (14.6 percent) babies globally, suffered from low birthweight in 2015. Low birthweight newborns have a higher risk of dying in the first 28 days after birth and those who survive are more likely to suffer from stunted growth and impaired cognitive development leading to increased risk of obesity and adult-onset chronic conditions, including diabetes, later in life.

Malnutrition in women of child-bearing age affects their and their children's health, born and unborn. Malnutrition results in the stunted growth and leads to impaired physical and cognitive development with lasting detriment to the individual and to the economic health of countries.

Adequate nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life – from conception to the second birthday – will not only save the lives of women and children and reduces stunted growth, wasting, and malnutrition but will improve the economies of countries.

When women of child-bearing age are well-nourished, they are healthier and better able to provide nourishment for their children in the womb and those they are

nursing. They are better able to make nutritious food choices for themselves and their young children; all essential to ensuring healthy physical and cognitive development. When children thrive, they are empowered to become healthy adults who are better equipped to make meaningful contributions to their families, society, and country.

Healthy children become healthy adults who are equipped with the stamina necessary for productive and sustainable agriculture, to attend school, to receive training in job skills, to enjoy improved health and well-being, and are better able to resist illness and disease.

The report, *Leveraging food systems for poverty and malnutrition reduction* by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth warns that the COVID-19 crisis will exacerbate maternal and child undernutrition and child mortality in low- and middle-income countries. It reports that more than half of the surveyed countries documented disruptions in antenatal care, sick child services and management of malnutrition in 2020.

Priests for Life urges the Commission on Social Development to prioritize the nutritional needs of children in the womb and the long-term impact of malnutrition to future generations, as it considers recovery from COVID-19 and the eradication of poverty and hunger.

The recent report of the Commission on Social Development Expert Group Meeting recognizes that children, adolescents, and youth have been among the hidden victims of the pandemic. It contains the troubling statement that continued disruptions to food and health systems could result in an additional 9.3 million wasted children between 2020 and 2022 (a 20% increase since 2019) and an increase in the numbers of stunted children, after two decades of global decline in stunting.

Children in the womb are the most hidden victims of the pandemic as they develop and grow during the most vulnerable time in every human being's life. What happens in the womb will affect them for the rest of their lives and will impact their families, communities and countries. Their health and nutritional needs must be included in programs that address poverty and nutrition and recovery from COVID-19.

Priests for Life believes that their lives, and every human life, need to be valued for their innate worth. No member of the human family should be stripped of human dignity and denied their most basic right – the right to life – through policies that allow individuals to be marginalized, treated as a problem, and their elimination considered an acceptable strategy for poverty eradication.

If the pledge of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind is to be realized, programs and policies to reduce poverty and hunger in all its forms and to recover from COVID-19 must encompass the complete life cycle, from conception to natural death, including those suffering disability or illness, the older persons, or children alive but not yet born. No individual, and no group, regardless of condition of dependency or stage of development, be treated as expendable and left behind.
