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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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Priests for Life, in its submission to the 68th Commission on the Status of Women, believes in advancing the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls through actions which do not violate the innate human dignity of others, especially the right to life of girls and boys alive in the womb but not yet born.

Priests for Life recalls the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which recognized that women's empowerment and equality begin at the earliest stages of life and that girls will only be truly empowered when they are not targeted for death once identified in the womb as female.

As the Commission on the Status of Women considers accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective, Priests for Life cautions that if gender-biased sex selection continues unabated, actions to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls will be undermined by this unjust discriminatory practice that denies a girl her very right to be born.

In order to eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which result in harmful and unethical practices including prenatal sex selection and infanticide.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action sought greater recognition of the human dignity and worth of young girls to assure their full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It specifically called on governments to enact and enforce legislation protecting girls from all forms of violence, including sex selective abortion.

It urged governments to give priority to developing programs and policies that foster norms and attitudes of zero tolerance for harmful and discriminatory attitudes, including son preference, which results in harmful and unethical practices including prenatal sex selection.

It expressed grave concern that discrimination against women and girls begins at the earliest stages of life and that son preference curtails the access of girls to food, education and health care and even life itself.

Priests for Life warns that son preference discrimination not only denies a girl child her right to life, but impedes empowerment and equality throughout life. This first act of sex discrimination and gender-based violence needs to be eliminated if equality and empowerment is to truly be achieved for all women and girls.

The long-term result of gender-biased abortion – skewed birth ratios – grossly undermine women's empowerment and equality and result in tens of millions of missing women and girls. The resulting imbalance of more men than women negatively impacts women and girls who suffer increased violence and abuse as they are kidnapped, forced into sex trafficking and prostitution, bought and sold as brides, and forced into child marriage. Without concerted action to eliminate this deadly and unjust harmful practice, it is expected that the number of missing women and girls will continue to increase in the years ahead.

Priests for Life cautions that any and all actions toward achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls are weakened by the underlying discrimination and violence against girls that begins at the earliest stages of life.

Priests for Life urges the Commission on the Status of Women to strongly voice opposition to the harmful practice of sex-selective abortion and work for its elimination so all women and girls have the opportunity for equality and empowerment.

Evidence demonstrates that women in countries with the highest distorted sex ratios at birth suffer from increased acts of violence and abuse, kidnappings, rapes, sex trafficking and prostitution, bride-selling, forced marriage, and child marriage as these countries struggle with the harmful consequences of missing women.

Tragically, owing to the global failure to end the devaluation of female lives prenatally, the number of missing girls and women continues to increase around the world. UNFPA's State of World Population 2020 reports that the number of missing women has more than doubled over the past 50 years rising from 61 million in 1970 to over 142 million in 2020 with missing female births totaling nearly 1.2 million annually due to sex-selective abortion.

The report stresses that sex selection distorts a country's population for generations and perpetuates the gender inequality which led to the distorted sex ratios in the first place. It explains that human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, direct governments to take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of the children.

Yet, this harmful practice continues. The data collection and analysis website, Our World in Data, projects that by 2030 there will be over 149 million missing women globally with sex-selective abortion the leading cause.

Priests for Life believes that education and economic opportunities are critical for all women and girls and can help liberate them from poverty along with access to economic and financial resources, land ownership and inheritance, leadership positions, and participation in decision-making.

Women and girls must not be treated unequally because of their critical role as mother. Actions to alleviate poverty need to recognize the essential role of women in the family and assist them in their efforts to escape poverty and experience full empowerment and equality for their and their families' welfare.

Mother Teresa, now St. Theresa of Calcutta, when accepting her Nobel Peace Prize spoke about poverty and said, "To me the nations who have legalized abortion, they are the poorest nations. They are afraid of the little one, they are afraid of the unborn child, and the child must die because they don't want to feed one more child, to educate one more child, the child must die."

The world is at the half way mark to achieving Agenda 2030 and needs to do more to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the human family, children alive in the womb but not yet born, are not left behind as efforts to achieve equality and empowerment for all women and girls continue.

The preborn girl child is most vulnerable individual in the world today and at the highest risk for the injustice of being denied her right to life.

Sustainable Development Target 5.3 calls for the elimination of all harmful practices in the attempt to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender-biased sex selection must not be allowed to continue as it impedes achievement of SDG 5 Gender equality.

Priests for Life asks: When will girls be treated equally and recognized, respected, and protected from discrimination and violence throughout their lives? How many more girls will lose their lives through the harmful practice of sex selection abortion before the world unites to stop it?

Priests for Life calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women to commit to ending the harmful practice of gender-biased sex selection. If equality and empowerment of all women and girls is to be achieved, a consistent non-discriminatory protection of all women and girls throughout the life cycle must be embraced and advanced. Equality begins in the womb.
