



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on Population and Development

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**Assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development**

### **Statement submitted by Priests for Life, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>1</sup>**

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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<sup>1</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Priests for Life concurs with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status. These include the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Priests for Life agrees with the Programme of Action's affirmation that human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development and people are the most important and valuable resource of any nation.

Priests for Life affirms the inherent right to life of every human being from conception to natural death and opposes attempts to eliminate select groups of people, including children alive in the womb but not yet born, especially preborn girls who are eliminated once identified in the womb through prenatal sex selection.

Prenatal sex selection is violent discrimination that was recognized as a harmful practice in the Programme of Action which called on governments to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which can result in harmful and unethical practices such as female infanticide, prenatal sex selection, and violence against the girl child.

In addressing the girl child, the Programme of Action expressed grave concern in 4.15 that discrimination against women and girls begins at the earliest stages of life and that son preference leads not only to loss of life for the youngest females but results in girls' lower rates of school enrolment and access to food and health care. It warned that the development of prenatal sex determination technologies have compounded the deadly practice of sex selective abortion.

Priests for Life warns that if the girl child can lose her life once her existence is known, Sustainable Development Goal 5 will never be fully achieved.

Targets for Goal 5 include ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres; and eliminating all harmful practices.

The Commission on Population and Development needs to address the long-term result of gender-biased abortion —skewed birth ratios— which grossly undermine women's empowerment and equality and result in tens of millions of missing women and girls. 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 totalling nearly 1.2 million annually due to sex-selective abortion.

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 urges the Commission on Population and Development to strongly voice opposition to the harmful practice of prenatal sex-selection and work for its elimination as stated in Sustainable Development Target 5.3 which calls for the elimination of all harmful practices in the effort to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender-biased sex selection must not be allowed to continue.

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 asks: How many more girls will lose their lives through the harmful practice of sex selection abortion before the world unites to stop it?

The world is at the halfway mark to achieving Agenda 2030 and children alive in the womb but not yet born are at the highest risk of being left behind as abortion is promoted as health care, as a so-called right or even as reproductive freedom.

Priests for Life concurs with the Programme of Action that governments should take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning, and in all cases post-abortive women should be provided humane treatment and counselling.

Priests for Life oversees the world's largest ministry for healing after abortion, Rachel's Vineyard, which offers hope and healing in a confidential and non-judgmental environment to thousands of post-abortive men and women each year who are suffering after abortion and helps them begin the process of restoration, renewal, and healing. Its partner ministry, Silent No More Awareness, encourages those hurt by abortion to express their abortion regret and find healing.

Pope Francis expressed strong opposition to what he called the discarding of human beings as in the frightful case of children, victims of abortion, who will never see the light of day because they were considered unnecessary. He laments the throwaway culture that not only discards food and objects but human beings themselves.

The Programme of Action envisions a world where everyone, without distinction of any kind, has the right to life, liberty, and security of person. Priests for Life agrees and believes the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development needs to include all, born or unborn, leaving no one behind.

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