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Statement submitted by Catholic Women’s League Australia, 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

The Catholic Women's League Australia represents approximately 5000 women across six Australian States. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the 60th Commission on the Status of Women.

The Brundtland Commission of 1987, defined sustainable development as, "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The outcome document of the United Nations Rio+20 Conference recognizes that "people are at the centre of sustainable development" and that there is a need for "holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development".

It follows that there is an ethical and human dimension to sustainable development, not just an economic dimension.

Other commentators have asserted that the human person is important and that sustainable development has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person. All factors that influence well-being — spiritual, physical, emotional, economic, social and cultural must be attended to.

It is, therefore, assumed, in this submission, that the term "sustainable development" refers to protecting the development and life of human beings, as well as all living creatures on earth.

Empowerment of Women by having a Healthy Regard for the Whole Person — Biological, Psychological, Social and Spiritual.

- True empowerment is respectful of the life and dignity of all mothers and children at all stages of life, from conception to natural death.
- The United Nations Human Rights Council passed a Resolution protecting families, this year. It recognises the role of the family in the development of the whole person and the nurture of children. This United Nations resolution says, "a conducive environment to strengthen and support all families, recognizing that equality between women and men and respect for all the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all family members are essential to family well-being and to society at large, noting the importance of the reconciliation of work and family life and recognizing the principle of shared parental responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child."
- Family Planning which respects the liberty of the man and woman, their human dignity and human rights should be encouraged. Natural Family Planning does this because it is a decision made by both spouses, it respects their human dignity and one party to the marriage does not carry all the burden of family planning.
- The Beijing Platform of Action states this point very powerfully, "The empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations."

Empowerment of Women through Information

- There is a great need for comprehensive, honest information to be given to women, to enable informed decision-making.
- The prevailing wisdom is that access to abortion reduces the rate of Maternal deaths. However, a recent study, conducted by the MELISA Institute, in 32 Mexican states and published in the open access version of the British Medical Journal challenges this notion. It found that Mexican states with less permissive abortion laws had 23 per cent lower overall maternal mortality, and up to 47 per cent lower mortality from complications of abortion.
- Lack of information, given to women, about the immediate and long-term effects of oral contraceptives is also a problem. Several forms of emergency contraception — the Morning After Pill, RU 486 are known to have serious adverse side effects. These side effects can and do alter the environment within the human body, having such profound effects as increasing the risk of cancer of the uterus, breast, endometrium, cervix, liver, bladder disease. Oral contraception was classed as a Class 1 carcinogen by the World Health Organisation, in 2005. Blood clots formed when using oral contraceptives increase the risk of strokes and heart attacks. Evidence has emerged that the use of oral contraceptives increases susceptibility to Human Immunodeficiency Virus.
- Oral contraceptives are promoted as a means of empowerment of women but have in reality enslaved them.
- The synthetic hormone, Ethinyl estradiol, in the contraceptive Pill is known to damage the environment, downstream from Water Treatment Plants. An Endocrine Disruptor, it alters the fertility and/or the genetic make-up of small water creatures.
- Women are rarely informed that all these forms of contraception are abortifacient.

Empowerment of Women through Ethical Decision-making and Adequate Research

- The Beijing Platform of Action states, “The social significance of maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family and in the upbringing of children should be acknowledged. The upbringing of children requires shared responsibility of parents, women and men and society as a whole. Maternity, motherhood, parenting and the role of women in procreation must not be the basis for discrimination nor restrict the full participation of women in society.”
- Women subjected to Female Genital Mutilation could be empowered by research being presented to their Governments outlining the long-term effects of this procedure on their health and on the economy of their country, provided the Government was willing to act.
- An important tool for combating Female Genital Mutilation — an awful violation of the human rights of women — is to fund and encourage more information, dissemination and training on this issue amongst health care professionals, and the population at large.
- Surrogacy is another area of violence against women and the result of unethical decisions. Both the surrogate mother and the children are treated as

commodities. Ovarian hyperstimulation causes health issues, including death, cysts, and cancer. Encouraging the donation of eggs — often by young women as a means of making money — is irresponsible. The long term health implications are starting to be documented but donors are not alerted, so informed consent is a sham. Outsourcing motherhood has become big business. According to the Non-Governmental Organization Sama Resource Group for Women and Health it was a \$2 billion industry in India, in 2012.

- Tying international aid to fertility reduction programs, such as the mass sterilization camps of India, is unethical and needs to stop.
- Also, according to the Asia News website, “4.6 million women underwent sterilisation against their will in India last year in accordance with the government’s birth control policies.”
- According to the Population Research Institute aggressive “aid” programs in Peru included bribes of food and clothing paid to poor women who submitted to sterilization.
- It does not serve humanity when almost every debate descends into controversial sexual rights.

Empowerment of Women through Autonomy and Social Responsibility

- Forced marriages and kidnapping for marriage result from denying autonomy to women who are old enough and ought instead to be empowered to give consent. Child marriages abuse young girls’ ability to give informed consent, since they are underage.
- Male guardianship, where women of all ages are treated as legal minors, having no say in their own lives, is an abuse against autonomy.
- Human Trafficking and modern slavery remove autonomy from all peoples, including women and girls, and need to be uppermost in the Commission on the Status of Women’s deliberations.
- Forced abortion, forced sterilization disempower women.
- Pornography and sex tourism undermine women by treating them as commodities to be bought and sold. Corruption is endemic in the industry. Prostitution, sex trafficking and sex-work have the same outcome.

Empowerment of Women by Ensuring They Have a Right to Life.

- With an estimated 100 million missing women worldwide due to various forms of gendercide, this form of empowerment is overdue. Women and girls are killed by female infanticide, honour killings, neglect of female health and inadequate nutrition, femicide (killing of female foetuses), gender selected abortions — to the point where approximately 100 million females, who should be alive, have been eliminated.

The reason the United Nations was set up was to solve global problems such as poverty, universal education and the availability of medicines to help people rise above mere survival. A reasoned and honest debate on issues faced by women, where all sides of the argument are listened to, would go a long way towards improving the well-being of women.