



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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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: strategies for the eradication of poverty to  
achieve sustainable development for all**

### **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 (PFL) advocates for strategies that respect human dignity in seeking to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development for all and believes that the well-being, dignity, and worth of all — every human life without exception — form the foundation of policies and programs that liberate countries and, most importantly, people from poverty. All individuals have the potential to make significant contributions to eradicating poverty; no life is expendable.

Strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all must “ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment”, as declared in “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

Priests for Life acknowledges the urgent need to eradicate poverty and its devastating impact and to implement programs and policies that will directly benefit all people, today and in the future, and ensure that no one is left behind.

Every human life needs to be valued for his or her innate worth and no member of the human family stripped of human dignity and denied their most basic right — the right to life — through policies that allow individuals to be marginalized and treated as a problem and their extinction considered an acceptable strategy for poverty eradication. The dignity of life needs to be acknowledged and protected throughout the life cycle, from conception to natural death, especially when the vulnerable human being is disabled, elderly or residing in the womb.

Population control, family planning, and reproductive health programs that target the elimination of children through abortion discriminate against children in the womb, and conflict with the Convention on the Rights of the Child which reminds us, “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth”. A majority of Member States restricts access to abortion with laws providing diverse prenatal legal protection to children.

Poverty eradication requires health care that respects human dignity during all stages of life. Renewed efforts to reduce newborn and maternal mortality are essential including ensuring the presence of skilled childbirth attendants who recognize obstetric emergencies and help women receive critical emergency obstetric care and treatment. Complications from childbirth including hemorrhage must continue to be prevented and treated and mothers provided with essential clean blood transfusions and antibiotics when needed. Increased access to pre-natal care, including adequate nutrition and vitamins, will save the lives of both mothers and children.

One of the most critical ways to alleviate poverty is to alleviate hunger and malnutrition as expressed in Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger — End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Malnutrition impedes progress and affects the economic potential of families and communities, especially when associated with stunted growth. Malnutrition results in the stunted growth of 165 million children resulting in impaired physical and cognitive development with lasting detriment to the individual and to the economic health of countries.

Malnutrition is the underlying cause of death for 3 million children a year according to UNICEF which reports that nearly half of all deaths in children under 5 are attributable to undernutrition. More than 800,000 babies — one in four newborns — die each year because they are born too soon or too small as a result of poor maternal nutrition. Adequate nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life —

from conception to the second birthday — saves the lives of women and children and reduces stunted growth and malnutrition.

When women of child-bearing age are well-nourished, they are healthier and better able to provide nourishment for their child in the womb, and to make nutritious food choices for their child under age two; all essential to ensuring healthy physical and cognitive development. When children thrive, they are empowered to go to school and become healthy adults who are better equipped to make meaningful contributions to their families, society, and country.

The elimination of malnutrition during the first 1,000 days of life for a child, and the provision of nutrition for all women of child-bearing age, will not only save the lives of women and children and contribute to their well-being, but will improve the economies of countries. Healthy individuals and families 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 enabled to resist illness and disease.

The need to protect the family and enable it to function as the core foundation of society is critical to poverty eradication and sustained development. Cultures throughout the world recognize the critical role of the family in providing the basic needs of food, water, shelter, clothing, love, and care. The family provides for the very survival of its culture and country. In turn, the family must be protected and assisted in all policies and programs to eradicate poverty. When the family is disrupted, individual members suffer, voiding the goal of development to assist the individual.

No individual member of the family ought to be selectively marked as expendable — regardless of disability, disease, age, condition of dependency or stage of development. All members of the family are deserving of protection, including those that have been classified as expendable by some and excluded from basic social protection. No member of the family ought to be stripped of their human dignity and denied their most basic right — the right to life. Life is not for the privileged, the perfect and the planned but extends to all members of the human family.

Strategies for the eradication of poverty should not strip any member of the human family of dignity, marginalize them or treat them as a problem, rather than as a potential contributor to sustainable development.

Pope Francis in his address to the United Nations General Assembly called for respect of all lives and stated, “The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic.”

Priests for Life concurs that our common home rises on the foundations that understand universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life. We believe that strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development ought to affirm the well-being, dignity and worth of all — every human being without exception — leading to a post 2030 world in which “no one was left behind”.