



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 January 2019

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development

Fifty-second session

1–5 April 2019

Item 3 of the provisional agenda¹

General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

(b) Review and appraisal 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

Statement submitted by Priests for Life, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

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.

¹ [E/CN.9/2019/1](#).

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The outcome document for the 2030 Agenda, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([A/RES/70/1](#)) stated that strategies for achievement of sustainable development must ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment. It pledged to leave no one behind.

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development also recognized the need to place people, their well-being and rights, at the centre of development. Principle 2 stated that human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development and that people are the most important and valuable resource of any nation. Priests for Life concurs and believes that the world we want for 2030 is one in which every human life is valued for her or his innate worth and recognizes that human dignity is the foundation of policies that liberate countries and, most importantly, people from poverty. Countries should ensure that all individuals are given the opportunity to make the most of their potential.

Priests for Life works to advance respect for life during all stages of the life cycle from conception to natural death and supports the Programme of Action's affirmation that people are the most important and valuable resource of any nation.

Priests for Life believes that if the pledge of Agenda 2030 to leave no one behind is to be achieved and if all human beings as the most important resource of a nation are to achieve their potential as stated in the Programme of Action, groups most excluded in today's world urgently need protection.

These groups span the life cycle beginning with the child, alive but still inside the womb, who as the Convention on the Rights of the Child reminds us needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth. The laws and policies of a majority of Member States oppose broad access to the violence of abortion and protect the child before birth.

Other groups in need of protection include the disabled and elderly who are most at risk from euthanasia. Priests for Life believes that life, in its most fragile state, is no less sacred than when it is in its healthiest and it is during life's most fragile state that legal protection is most needed to ensure that no one is excluded and left behind as we move towards 2030.

Priests for Life seeks protection of fundamental human rights for all human beings from conception to natural death, that extend to all members of the human family regardless of sex, stage of development, age, or condition of disability or dependency and opposes the life-ending practices of abortion and euthanasia.

Advancement of women's equality and empowerment are also recognized as essential to development in both the 2030 Agenda and the Programme of Action. The Programme of Action seeks in Principle 4 to advance gender equality and equity, the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women while the 2030 Agenda seeks in Sustainable Development Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

The Programme of Action critically recognized that discrimination on the basis of sex often starts at the earliest stages of life and referred to prenatal sex selection as a harmful and unethical practice along with female infanticide. It also expressed concern for son preference that curtails not only access to life but to food, education and health care, all critical aspects of development as stated in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized prenatal sex selection as not only discrimination but as an act of violence against women and an act of violence against the girl child in the womb.

The identification of a girl child in the womb followed by her termination is the beginning of pernicious gender-based violence that perpetuates throughout a girl's life cycle. This discrimination not only denies millions of girls their basic right to existence, but it grossly undermines women's empowerment. Its continued prevalence is a global failure to protect the most vulnerable girls from the most lethal form of discrimination – sex selection abortion.

Twenty-five years after Cairo, there is agreement that empowerment and equality of women and girls are essential to development, but the practice of prenatal sex selection and its lethal discrimination against the youngest of females has failed to be universally opposed and recognized as harmful and unethical as stated in the Programme of Action.

Today, prenatal sex selection is increasingly no longer confined to countries in Asia but is also evident in imbalanced sex ratios in several countries in Eastern Europe and among ethnic groups around the world. The consequences of the imbalance present serious social and economic implications impacting women's and girls' lives and well-being.

The failure to stop the lethal practice of prenatal sex selection has created dire consequences for women and girls. Research and data from the countries most affected by prenatal sex selection demonstrate the disturbing outcome from the large number of missing girls and women due to sex selection abortion – increased acts of violence against women and girls including increases in kidnappings, rapes, sex trafficking and prostitution, bride-selling, and child marriage.

Demographers warn in *Missing Girls: A Globalizing Issue* that the systemic elimination of girls before their birth is the most extreme symptom of women's contemporary undervaluation. They also warn that the elimination of girls before their birth and the imbalanced sex ratios that result will continue with dire consequences. The worldwide number of missing women from 2010–2050 is expected to rise for two more decades before peaking at 150 million in 2035 with significant impact on population dynamics as men will vastly outnumber women of marriageable age for over two generations in countries most impacted.

If SDG 5 is to be achieved, governments must heed 4.2.3 of the Programme of Action and take the necessary measures to prevent sex selection and promote an integrated approach for widespread social, cultural and economic change, in addition to legal reforms.

In 1994, the Programme of Action expressed concern about the use of prenatal sex determination technologies that existed at the time in countries with son preference and the rise in the number of girls aborted as a result. Today's advances in technology have exacerbated the problem. Unless concerted action is taken to stop sex selection termination, access to prenatal sex determination testing kits and access to drugs for self-induced sex selection abortion will lead to increased imbalanced sex ratios at birth.

The result will be an escalating need to protect girls and women in countries and regions where men greatly outnumber women from increased acts of violence. Women's and girls' progress in education and employment opportunities are also likely to be adversely affected due to the increasing threat of violence against women in public and private spaces.

The failure to eliminate sex selection abortion as urged in the Programme of Action hinders social and economic development, women's equality and empowerment, and jeopardizes achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Priests for Life calls on the Commission for Population and Development to urgently act to eliminate the practice of prenatal sex selection abortion recognized in the Programme of Action as a harmful and unethical act of discrimination to ensure that the girl child is not left behind in the 2030 Agenda.
