



## 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: promoting empowerment of people in achieving  
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and  
decent work 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.



## Statement

Policies that empower people to achieve poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all contribute significantly to sustainable development and must be based on the dignity and intrinsic value of every human being. It was recognized in the Declaration on the Right to Development that the human person is the central subject of the development process and that development policy should therefore make the human being the main participant and beneficiary of development (General Assembly resolution [41/128](#), annex).

Our commitment to human rights springs from our commitment to the protection, affirmation and defence of all human beings, both those born and those residing in the womb, as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly remind us. Priests for Life affirms that respect for the dignity and worth of every human life, without exception, is the foundation of policies and programmes that free countries and, most importantly, people from poverty. All individuals have the potential to make significant contributions to eradicating poverty; no life is expendable.

### Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication

According to the United Nations, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has declined by half at the global level, yet 1 in 8 people worldwide are still suffering from hunger. Women in particular are affected by a lack of nutritious food. Their lives, and the lives of their children, suffer the effects of malnutrition.

Malnutrition is the underlying cause of death for at least 3.1 million children per year and is responsible for 45 per cent of all deaths among children under 5 years of age. More than 800,000 babies — 1 in 4 newborns — die each year because they are born too soon or too small as a result of poor maternal nutrition.

Malnutrition leads to stunted growth of children. Stunted children become adults who suffer from diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease, conditions that not only result in poor health but also often impede earning capacity and result in lower incomes. Of particular concern, women affected by stunting give birth to children who are also likely to be afflicted by this preventable condition, perpetuating the cycle of malnutrition and poverty.

Adequate nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life — from conception to the second birthday — saves the lives of women and children and improves the prosperity of a country. In a new and incisive series published by *The Lancet* on maternal and child nutrition, an urgent plea is made to Governments to make nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life, and for all women of childbearing age, the centre of the new development goals.

As stated in the article entitled “Maternal and child nutrition: building momentum for impact”, published by *The Lancet*, “the new evidence provided in the Maternal and Child Nutrition Series strengthens the case for a continued focus on the first 1,000 days. Investments within this window can help meet crucial goals: the prevention of undernutrition, overweight, and poor child development outcomes with longlasting effects on human capital formation”.

This unique window of opportunity affects the life and health of the preborn child throughout her or his lifetime, while also improving the mother’s health.

Adequate nutrition for pregnant women, lactating mothers and all women and adolescent girls of childbearing age needs to be prioritized in food policies, for the sake of women, children and nations.

National Governments, through the Scaling Up Nutrition movement endorsed by the Secretary-General, are taking action to ensure that the right policies are in place to implement programmes to improve nutrition for women. If women of childbearing age are well nourished, they are healthier and able to provide nourishment for the child in the womb to ensure healthy physical and cognitive development. Healthy children thrive and are empowered to become healthy adults who are better equipped to make meaningful contributions to their families and society and contribute to the eradication of poverty.

### **Social integration**

The lack of nutrition and food security not only adversely affects women and adolescent girls, reducing their ability to experience full social integration and threatening their overall health, but also has an impact on future generations, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. In an article in *The Lancet* entitled “Only collective action will end undernutrition”, emphasis is laid on the importance of preparing adolescents and women of reproductive age for pregnancy and placing this urgency at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda:

“We are in a race against time to eradicate the global scourge of undernutrition. Undernutrition cripples global economic growth and development, and future global prosperity and security are intimately linked with our ability to respond adequately to this urgent challenge. ... Its results stunt the physical growth and life chances of millions of people, and for Africa and Asia estimates suggest that up to 11 per cent of national economic productivity is lost to undernutrition.

...

Women and girls are at the heart of this message. As the bearers and carers of children, their health and economic potential is entwined with that of future generations. Unless girls grow well in early childhood and adolescence and enter into motherhood well-nourished, are lent support during pregnancy, protected from heavy physical labour, and empowered to breastfeed and provide good food for their babies and toddlers, the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition will not be broken.”

True social integration precludes any member of the family being treated unfairly or selectively marked as expendable, regardless of sex, age, race, disability, disease, condition of dependency or stage of development. All members of the family are deserving of durable protection, including those who have been classified as expendable by some and excluded from basic social protection. No member of the family should be stripped of his or her human dignity and denied his or her most basic right — the right to life.

Children in developing countries especially should be valued for their innate human dignity and human potential and not treated as expendable in population control programmes. Children identified with a disability in the womb need to be welcomed at birth and provided with the best medical care available. As children

mature, their lives need protection, especially because a growing number face challenges brought on by developmental problems such as autism.

Persons with disabilities are deserving of support and assistance, including with regard to securing employment. Ageing individuals increasingly need policies that provide for their care, given that the intergenerational balance of the family has severely shifted, resulting in fewer family caregivers.

States need to protect the family and enable it to function as the core foundation of society. When the family is disrupted and devalued, individual members suffer greatly, voiding the goal of development to assist the individual. It is our duty to protect and provide for all members of the family through sustainable policies to eradicate poverty.

### **Conclusion**

Authentic development empowers all members of the family in policies and programmes and supports the family when it is suffering from economic and social hardship and deprivation. It is recognized in the Declaration on the Right to Development that the human being is the main participant and beneficiary of development. Social development policies ought not to allow any member of the family to be selectively marked as expendable.

All members of the family are deserving of protection, including those who have been excluded from basic social protection. No member of the family ought to be stripped of his or her human dignity and denied his or her most basic right — the right to life — through policies to end poverty and provide empowerment.

Governments need to make nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life (from conception to the second birthday), as well as for all women of childbearing age and adolescent girls, the centre of development policies. Such a focus not only saves the lives of women and children, but also helps to empower children for a healthier, productive life, contributing to the prosperity of a country as adults.

The human rights of all members of the human family — without exception — were recognized in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the right to life for everyone. Fundamental respect for human life and human rights cannot be negotiable or contingent on age, sex, race, disability, wantedness, condition of dependency or stage of development.

The intrinsic dignity of life is the foundation of human rights. Life is not just for the privileged, the perfect and the planned, but extends to all members of the human family, including preborn children. Policies to eradicate poverty must recognize the potential of all individuals to help to solve the problem of poverty and not treat people as the problem.

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