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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Review theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (agreed conclusions of the sixty-second session)

Priests for Life expresses concern that the agreed conclusions from the sixty-second session Commission on the Status of Women, Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls, failed to address the harmful practice of sex-selective abortion which denies tens of millions of girls their basic right to existence, especially in rural areas with a son preference.

In its submission to the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Priests for Life emphasized the critical need to address the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls during all phases of a woman's life. Nothing is more critical than ending the harmful practice of prenatal sex selection which identifies girls in the womb and ends their lives before they are born. Tragically, this harmful practice is not even mentioned in the agreed conclusions despite the call to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, in both public and private spheres, and has lasting negative repercussions for women's empowerment and equality.

The discrimination of sex-selective abortion not only denies preborn baby girls their basic right to life but also grossly undermines women's empowerment and equality as the long-term result of gender-biased abortion, skewed birth ratios, results in tens of millions of missing women and girls. The resulting imbalance negatively impacts women and girls who suffer increased violence and abuse as they are kidnapped, forced into sex trafficking and prostitution, bought and sold as brides, and forced into child marriage. Without concerted action to eliminate this deadly and harmful practice, it is expected that the number of missing women and girls will continue to increase in the years ahead.

While the agreed conclusions reaffirm the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it neglects to call out gender-biased abortion as a harmful practice. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called prenatal sex selection a harmful practice and an act of violence against women. It expressed grave concern that discrimination against women and girls begins at the earliest stages of life and that son preference is curtailing the access of girls to food, education and health care and even life itself.

In order to eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which result in harmful and unethical practices including prenatal sex selection. It further explained that the problem of early discrimination against the girl child is compounded by increased use of technologies to determine the sex of the child prenatally resulting in the abortion of girls once identified in the womb.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action sought greater recognition of the human dignity and worth of young girls to assure their full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It specifically called on governments to enact and enforce legislation protecting girls from all forms of violence, including sex selective abortion. It urged governments to give priority to developing programs and policies that foster norms and attitudes of zero tolerance for harmful and discriminatory attitudes, including son preference, which results in harmful and unethical practices including prenatal sex selection.

Tragically, owing to the global failure to work 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 totaling 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.

State of World Population 2020 stresses that sex selection distorts a country's population for generations and perpetuates the gender inequality which caused the distorted sex ratios in the first place. It states that human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, direct governments to take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of the children.

The report states that while international human rights law defers to nations to legislate on abortion, a plethora of recognized human rights together frame son preference as manifested in gender-biased sex selection as a human rights violation. It reports that governments endorsing Sustainable Development Goal 5, for gender equality, agreed to prohibit harmful practices in Target 5.3, which the report attests include gender-biased sex selection. The current decade of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 needs to include a unified global commitment to abolish the harmful and deadly practice of prenatal sex selection.

Priests for Life urges the Commission on the Status of Women to strongly voice opposition to the harmful practice of sex-selective abortion and work for its elimination. Women's empowerment and equality begin at the earliest stages of life; girls will only be truly empowered when they have an equal right to life and are not targeted for death once they are identified in the womb as female.

Priests for Life recognizes that abortion by its very nature is deadly to all children alive in the womb but not yet born and believes that all mothers and their unborn children, girls and boys, are deserving of assistance, care, and protection. Priests for Life believes that all preborn children have innate dignity and worth and is committed to promoting and protecting their right to life, the first and most basic human right.
