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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

Priests for Life is concerned that 25 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, girls are still losing their lives through prenatal sex selection. While the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action acknowledged that discrimination and violence against girls begin at the earliest stages of life and that prenatal sex selection is not only an act of violence against women but violence against the girl child in the womb, the practice continues resulting in millions of missing women and girls.

Priests for Life seeks to ensure that there are no exceptions to the right to life including based on sex, age, race, or disability from conception to natural death. It works to protect the right to life of unborn baby girls, and boys, from the violence of abortion and believes that the lives of girls need to be valued and protected from their very beginning, while they are developing in the womb, as stated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Elimination of prenatal sex selection. During the 25 year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action the rampant practice of sex selection abortion cannot be ignored and must be addressed. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action warned that son preference curtails the access of girls not only to food, education, and health care but to life itself.

Today, the girl child continues to face discrimination which is most severe in the use of prenatal sex determination techniques that identify her presence in the womb and leads to her termination in abortion. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action opposed this practice stating that discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life in the womb and must therefore be addressed from then onwards.

Priests for Life believes that consistent non-discriminatory protection of girls, beginning in the womb, must be embraced and advanced unhindered by pro-abortion activism.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called on governments to enact and enforce legislation protecting girls from all forms of violence including female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference. It recognized that the result of male child preference is harmful and unethical practices such as prenatal sex selection and female infanticide. In addition, it recognized that sex selection abortion is compounded by the use of technologies that determine whether or not the unborn child is a girl followed by her death in abortion.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called upon governments and international and non-governmental organizations to formulate and implement plans of action to eliminate all acts of violence against women. Pro-abortion activism must not be allowed to suppress concerted efforts to save the lives of the youngest females.

Sex selection leads to increased acts of violence and exploitation. Priests for Life notes the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's call for the effective suppression of trafficking in women and girls for the sex trade, which it described as a matter of pressing international concern. It called on governments to take appropriate actions to address the root factors of sex trafficking in order to eliminate trafficking in women.

Mounting evidence demonstrates that countries with the highest distorted sex ratios at birth have a shortage of women which is leading to increases in acts of violence, kidnappings, rapes, sex trafficking and prostitution, bride-selling, forced

marriage, and child marriage as these countries struggle with unprecedented demographic challenges precipitated by significant numbers of missing women.

The increase in sex trafficking and other acts of violence against women and girls, especially in countries in Asia, appears linked to high rates of sex selection abortion of unborn infant girls suggesting that violence against girls in the womb leads to increased violence against women and girls.

The United Nations Population Funds' publication, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current Trends, Consequences and Policy Implications*, warns that present-day distorted sex ratios are going to have a lasting impact on population dynamics especially in Asia and the situation for women and girls is likely to further deteriorate in the years to come. It states that the sex ratio for the entire world population is 101 males to 100 females but national census data in a number of South Asian, East Asian and Central Asian countries indicates that sex-ratio imbalances have grown in favor of boys with distorted levels of sex ratio at birth between 110 and 120 males per 100 females. Marriage projections suggest that the number of single men trying to marry after 2030 in China and India might exceed for several decades the corresponding number of unmarried women by 50–60 per cent.

The socio-economic consequences of these trends are alarming and include potential risks of human rights violations such as abduction, trafficking and sale of women and girls for the purposes of forced marriage or sexual exploitation. The shortage of women also has economic and employment consequences including a shortage of caregivers for aging populations.

Demographers writing in the *Lancet* article *How many more missing women?* project that the worldwide number of missing women from 2010–2050 will rise for two more decades before peaking at 150 million in 2035.

The demographic consequences of distorted sex ratios at birth will continue to result in violence against women and girls as the world moves to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Social protection for girls and women in impacted countries and regions will become more urgent. Women's and girls progress in education and employment are likely to be affected due to the increasing threat of violence in public and private spaces.

Conclusion. As women from around the world gather to mark the 25th review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its implementation, actions must be taken to stop the harmful discriminatory practice of prenatal sex selection that ends the lives of millions of girls.

The identification of a girl child in the womb followed by her termination is the beginning of pernicious gender-based violence that affects girls in male preference societies throughout their lives, not only denying millions of girls their basic right to existence but grossly undermining women's empowerment and equality.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized this harmful practice of violence and discrimination against girls, and urged governments to work to eliminate it. By not preventing this deadly act of discrimination, governments not only fail to provide protection to girls in the earliest stages of life but such failure results in violence against women and girls in childhood and adulthood hindering social and economic development and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

How many more girls will lose their lives when they are identified in the womb as female and eliminated through the harmful practice of sex selection abortion?

When will the innate value of women and girls will be recognized, respected, and protected from discrimination and violence throughout the life cycle? The

demographic forecast that the worldwide number of missing women and girls will peak at 150 million in 2035 requires immediate attention and action.

Priests for Life calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, United Nations Population Fund, and all relevant United Nations entities to commit to ending this act of gendercide. A consistent non-discriminatory protection of girls beginning in the womb must be embraced and advanced.

Priests for Life is concerned that pro-abortion activist efforts advancing unfettered access to abortion impede progress in saving the lives of girls in the womb, the most vulnerable group of girls in the world today, from fatal gender-based violence.

Girls of the world need to have their lives protected and respected right from the start, in the womb, as stated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
