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Statement submitted by Pro-Life Campaign, 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

The Pro Life Campaign has made this submission in response to the invitation for written submissions for the seventy-first session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. This submission highlights the urgent need for the United Nations to recognise and act on the reality of the overlap between poverty and coerced or unwanted abortion.

As a human rights organisation based in Ireland, we firmly believe that no woman should ever feel compelled to have an abortion due to socioeconomic factors. This concern directly overlaps with the United Nations' commitment to achieving an end to poverty, the first of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Every pregnant woman should have access to the practical, financial and social supports necessary to empower her to continue her pregnancy rather than feeling that her socio-economic circumstances leave her with no choice but abortion. Addressing poverty must therefore include recognising the difficulties faced by women experiencing unplanned pregnancies and ensuring that they are provided with meaningful support.

Unfortunately, the United Nations' record in response to fears of an impending population crisis has too often been to support population reduction through measures such as abortion. This distracts from the objective of eliminating poverty and undermines the right guaranteed by international law to found a family. Rather than treating population reduction

as a solution to poverty, greater attention must be given to addressing the economic and social circumstances that leave women feeling unable to continue their pregnancies.

In a review of international studies of women who sought an abortion, up to 80-86 per cent of women cited socio-economic factors as their primary reason (Bankole, Singh and Haas, 1998). This underlines the reality that addressing the alarmingly high global abortion rate is indelibly linked with tackling poverty and providing opportunities for women to feel economically secure and sufficiently socially supported to continue their pregnancies and have their babies.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing the circumstances in which women make decisions about their pregnancies. The cost of living crisis, the housing crisis and a general lack of practical support can place considerable pressure on women experiencing unplanned pregnancies – particularly in the West. Elsewhere, the far worse problems of poverty present even more challenges. As such, the issue of the link between abortion and poverty is universal.

If the United Nations is committed to ending poverty, it must recognise that poverty and abortion are closely linked in circumstances where women feel compelled by socio-economic realities to have an abortion against their own wishes. Addressing these circumstances requires policies that provide practical assistance to women and families,

rather than approaches that treat the reduction of population growth as a means of achieving development.

Since the removal of Ireland's constitutional protections for unborn life and the introduction of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, which has overseen abortion in Ireland since 2019, the number of women having abortions has risen dramatically.

In 2018, the year of the abortion referendum, 2,911 Irish women had abortions, according to the Abortion Statistics for England and Wales: 2018 report and the 32 Irish cases under the 2013 abortion act. Eight years on, the most recent Government statistics show that there were 10,600 abortions in Ireland in 2025, according to the Department of Health's annual report for that year. This increase can only partially be explained by factors such as population growth. Factors such as the cost-of-living crisis, the housing crisis and the chronic lack of supports for women to enable them to continue their pregnancies have played a major role in Ireland's high abortion rate.

A 2023 survey of 3,000 parents in the north of Ireland carried out by the group 'Melted Parents NI' found that parents have had abortions due solely to not being able to afford additional childcare bills. 82% of parents surveyed said the costs of childcare, which are the highest in Europe, has impacted their decision not to have more children. This includes many parents who additionally have considered abortion due to the rising costs.

These circumstances highlight the urgent need to ensure that women experiencing unplanned pregnancies are not left without meaningful alternatives. Where women face financial hardship, insecure accommodation or insufficient assistance, their ability to continue a pregnancy may be significantly affected. The Irish State must therefore give greater priority to providing practical supports that enable women to continue their pregnancies, particularly when they are experiencing difficult socioeconomic circumstances.

Unfortunately, the Irish State has been found wanting in the area of providing meaningful supports for women in unplanned pregnancies. Instead, the focus has been on making abortion even more pervasive across Irish society, rather than ensuring that women have access to the practical and financial assistance they need to continue their pregnancies. This focus has been supported by the media and many publicly funded activist groups.

Since 2018, public funding has flowed towards organisations that promote abortion. State support has been withdrawn or sharply reduced from charities and initiatives whose ethos does not align with support for abortion. This reallocation of funding has undoubtedly contributed to the increased abortion rate. For example, significant reductions in public funding for charities which provide services to women in unplanned pregnancies, including those facing homelessness, points to the unfortunate situation in Ireland today. Pregnancy and early motherhood can be extremely difficult when a woman lacks secure accommodation, financial stability and access to appropriate support services. Reducing the availability of

assistance for these women risks leaving them with fewer practical alternatives at a time when they may need help most urgently.

The State must ensure that women in unplanned pregnancies have access to comprehensive support, including housing assistance, social welfare supports, counselling and services for new mothers. Such assistance should be readily available and clearly communicated so that women are not left feeling that they are being pushed toward abortion.

In Ireland, the Health Service Executive provides a telephone service known as MyOptions, which ostensibly caters for women by providing information about “all your options”. Its mission statement claims this includes information on abortion, as well as information on “continued pregnancy supports”. Regrettably, since its launch MyOptions has operated as a de facto abortion referral service. The telephone counsellors provide scant information relating to supports for women who may be interested in continuing their pregnancies.

MyOptions is failing in its stated mission to provide non-directive counselling. Its counsellors have been recorded advising women to make abortion appointments and suggesting abortion to undecided women as a “solution”. This was included in a 2022 study by the group Students For Life and was even acknowledged in a 2024 television programme by the state broadcaster, RTÉ Investigates.

A service intended to provide women with information about all their options should ensure that comprehensive information is readily and clearly available about the supports available to them. This should include information on adoption services, social welfare supports, counselling, housing assistance and other programmes, such as the Young Parents Support Programme.

MyOptions must be overhauled. Its counsellors should receive comprehensive training that enables them to provide women with clear and accessible information about the practical supports available to allow them to continue their pregnancies. New guidelines must ensure that they do not engage in directive counselling toward abortion. This would have a significant impact on ensuring that women in poverty and facing difficult circumstances receive the help and supports they need for their own welfare and for that of their baby.

The Pro Life Campaign urges the United Nations to recognise the urgent need to address the overlap between poverty and coerced/unwanted abortion. No woman should ever feel compelled to have an abortion due to socio-economic factors. No woman should be left without meaningful support just because she wishes to continue her pregnancy.

The United Nations' commitment to ending poverty must include a recognition that women experiencing unplanned pregnancies can face considerable economic and social pressures. Particularly in countries of the Global South, there is a need for supranational organisations like the United Nations to avoid promoting abortion. The laws and cultures of

these areas must be respected, especially the widespread opposition to abortion. Ultimately, eliminating poverty must mean ensuring that women never feel compelled by their socio-economic circumstances to have an abortion.