

Parliamentary Pro-Life Caucus



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For Immediate Release

Canadian MPs support UNICEF in calling for elimination of female feticide

(OTTAWA - May 9, 2007) “This year marks the 30th anniversary of International Woman’s Day and this year’s theme is ‘Eliminating violence against women,’” said MP Maurice Vellacott, Conservative Co-chair of the Parliamentary Pro-Life Caucus. “Often forgotten is the systemic violence against women, both preborn and pregnant, through prenatal sex selection.”

“Selecting preborn girls for termination, simply because they are female, is an important example of the violence and discrimination that still exist against women and girls in Canada today,” said Paul Steckle, Liberal Co-chair of the Parliamentary Pro-Life Caucus.

Worldwide, millions of girls are “missing” as a result of prenatal sex selection—as many as 80 million in China and India alone, say researchers. “The sheer numbers of surplus males raises the specter of a host of social problems, including female trafficking and other forms of crime,” say Yanzhong Huang and Dali L. Yang, authors of a report in the Spring 2006 issue of *Chinese Historical Review* entitled, “China’s unbalanced sex ratios: Politics and Policy Responses.”

Research conducted by Andrea Mrozek, the current Manager of Research and Communications at the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, reveals that a cultural preference for sons exists within some communities in Canada and has resulted in thousands of “lost daughters” who were aborted simply because they were female—a practice UNICEF calls “female foeticide” and whose representative to India in 2005, Mr. Cecilio Adorna, publicly condemned: “It is fundamentally wrong, morally wrong, socially wrong and developmentally wrong to tolerate, stand and watch such acts of sex selection and violence against girls...Zero tolerance for discrimination and violence against girls must be the order of the day.”

Each year, the multi-party Pro-life Caucus holds a press conference in conjunction with the National March for Life, in an act of solidarity with pro-life Canadians. The MPs will be joined this year by Ms. Mrozek who will be presenting research on prenatal sex selection, Thursday, May 10, at 10 a.m. in the Charles Lynch Press Theatre (room 130-S Centre Block).

“We need to raise awareness in this country of the equality of all human beings and find ways to protect mothers and their preborn baby girls from acts of violence and discrimination,” said Mr. Vellacott. “Aborting a little girl for being the ‘wrong sex’ represents a failure on the part of our society to honour and respect the dignity of all Canada’s children equally and undermines the unconditional love of the parent-child bond,” said Mr. Steckle.

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Pour diffusion immédiate

Des députés canadiens appuient l'Unicef en vue d'éliminer le féticide féminin

(OTTAWA – Le 9 mai 2007) « Nous célébrons cette année le 30^e anniversaire de la Journée internationale de la femme, sous le thème Éliminons la violence contre les femmes », a déclaré Maurice Vellacott, député conservateur et coprésident du caucus parlementaire pro-vie. « On oublie souvent la violence systémique faite aux femmes, à la fois contre les fœtus de sexe féminin et les femmes enceintes, sous forme de sélection sexuelle prénatale. »

« Interrompre une grossesse uniquement parce que l'enfant à naître est de sexe féminin est l'illustration parfaite de la violence et de la discrimination dont sont toujours victimes les femmes et les filles au Canada », d'ajouter Paul Steckle, coprésident libéral du caucus parlementaire pro-vie.

Partout dans le monde, il « manque » des millions de filles en raison de la sélection sexuelle prénatale – pas moins de 80 millions en Chine et en Inde uniquement, selon les chercheurs. « Le nombre même de garçons en surplus laisse entrevoir un déluge de problèmes sociaux à venir, dont la traite des filles et des femmes et d'autres formes de crimes », prédisent Yanzhong Huang et Dali L. Yang, auteurs d'un rapport paru dans l'édition du printemps 2006 de *Chinese Historical Review*, intitulé « China's unbalanced sex ratios: Politics and Policy Responses ».

Selon d'autres recherches menées par Mme Andrea Mrozek, directrice actuelle de la Recherche et des Communications à l'Institut du mariage et de la famille Canada, il existe bel et bien une préférence culturelle pour les garçons dans certains milieux au Canada, ce qui entraîne des milliers d'avortements de filles, une pratique que l'Unicef appelle « féticide féminin ». M. Cecilio Adorna, représentant de l'Unicef en Inde, a condamné publiquement cette pratique : « Que ce soit d'un point de vue fondamental, moral, social ou développemental, il est inacceptable de tolérer et d'assister à de tels actes de sélection en fonction du sexe et de violence contre les filles. Tolérance zéro à l'égard de la discrimination et de la violence contre les filles : voilà ce que doit être notre mot d'ordre ».

Chaque année, le caucus multipartite pro-vie tient une conférence de presse en collaboration avec la Marche nationale pour la vie, en solidarité avec les Canadiens pro-vie. Les députés seront accompagnés cette année de Mme Mrozek, qui présentera des recherches sur la sélection sexuelle prénatale, le jeudi 10 mai à 10 heures dans la salle de presse Charles-Lynch (pièce 130-S de l'édifice du Centre).

« Nous devons sensibiliser notre pays à l'égalité de tous les êtres humains et trouver des façons de protéger les mères et leurs petites filles à naître contre les actes de violence et de discrimination », a ajouté le député Vellacott. « Pratiquer un avortement parce que le fœtus est du « mauvais sexe » illustre l'échec de notre société à honorer et à respecter de façon égale la dignité de tous les enfants du Canada et sape l'amour inconditionnel qu'incarne le lien parent-enfant », de conclure M. Steckle.

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Prenatal Sex Selection

Quotes / References

Discrimination against women and girls...

“Inequality is always tragic and sometimes fatal. **Prenatal sex selection and infanticide**, prevalent in parts of South and East Asia, show the low value placed on the lives of girls and women and have led to unbalanced populations where men outnumber women. (Source: The State of the World’s Children 2007, “Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality, UNICEF, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07.pdf>)

“Gender discrimination begins early. Modern diagnostic tools for pregnancy have made it possible to determine a child’s sex in the earliest phase. Where there is a clear economic or cultural preference for sons, the misuse of these techniques can facilitate female foeticide. Although there is no conclusive evidence to confirm such illegal misuse, birth histories and census data reveal an unusually high proportion of male births and male children under five in Asia, notably in China and India, suggesting **sex selective foeticide and infanticide** in the world’s two most populous countries – despite initiatives to eradicate these practices in both countries.” (Source: The State of the World’s Children 2007, “Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality, UNICEF, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07.pdf>)

“... in many countries available indicators show that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. In some areas of the world, men outnumber women by 5 in every 100. The reasons for the discrepancy include, among other things, harmful attitudes and practices, such as female genital mutilation, son preference - which results in female infanticide and **prenatal sex selection...**” (Source: Platform for Action, The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/girl.htm>)

“The range of violence against women and girls is devastating, occurring quite literally from womb to tomb. It includes: abortion of female babies (**prenatal sex selection**), killing of female infants (female infanticide)... (Source: Elimination of Violence against Women, UNIFEM, <http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/projects/evaw/evawindex.htm>)

“Where its use is most widespread, prenatal diagnosis for **sex selection** reveals clear discrimination against the girl child, leading to severe gender imbalances in the population. For decades, women’s rights groups in these regions and disability rights groups internationally led the struggle to expose the discriminatory use of these technologies. They sought, and in many cases succeeded, in getting laws passed to regulate their use. But, due to poor oversight and implementation, rampant misuse continues.” (Source: Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment statement on “Campaign to End Sex Selection” <http://cwpe.org/initiatives/sexselection>)

“In the South Asian context, giving birth to a son enhances a woman’s status within the family, whereas her inability to produce a male heir may result in humiliation, contempt, abuse, and abandonment. Men frequently blame their wives for not giving birth to a male child. In-laws may also openly threaten their daughters-in-law with dire consequences if they are unable to produce a son. In abusive situations, a woman may be forced to undergo tests to identify the sex of her unborn child, and then coerced to abort if the fetus is female. Women may be beaten and/or divorced for not giving birth to sons. An abusive spouse may use the birth of a daughter as a pretext for violence towards his wife, and then be violent towards the unwanted daughter.” (Source: “Sex Selection: New Technologies, New Forms of Gender Discrimination,” by Rajani Bhatia, Rupsa Mallik, and Shamita Das Dasgupta, October 1, 2003, <http://www.cwpe.org/resources/healthrepro/sexselnewtech>)

“Before sex-selective abortion was outlawed in 1994, clinics would advertise terminating girls as ‘spend 3,000 now and save 300,000 later.’”(Source: “India’s Missing Girls, The Guardian, February 28, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/india/story/0,,2022983,00.html>)

“Differential gender mortality has been a documented problem for decades and led to reports in the early 1990s of 100 million ‘missing women’ across the developing world. Since that time, improved health care and conditions for women have resulted in reductions in female mortality, but these advances have now been offset by a huge increase in the use of **sex-selective abortion**, which became available in the mid-1980s. Largely as a result of this practice, there are now an estimated **80 million missing females in India and China alone.**” (Source: “Abnormal sex ratios in human populations: Causes and consequences,” Therese Hesketh and Zhu Wei Xing, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, August 28, 2006, <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/103/36/13271>)

...in India

“Prabhat Jha, Canada Research Chair of Health and Development at the University of Toronto, surveyed 1.1 million households in India. His findings are dramatic – for every 1,000 boys born in 1997, only 759 girls were born....Widely available ultrasounds and safe abortions have made sex selection possible, according to the study. The decrease in female births directly correlates with the increased use of ultrasounds.” (Source: “Selective abortion targets females in India,” Mathura Thevarajah, McGill Daily, January 31, 2006, <http://www.mcgilldaily.com/view.php?aid=4760>)

“‘One study in India followed 8,000 consecutive abortions in a clinic and only three of them were males,’ said professor Margaret Somerville, founding director of the McGill Centre for Medicine, Ethics, and Law. She believes that the elimination of girls is appalling and a breach of human rights.” (Source: “Selective abortion targets females in India,” Mathura Thevarajah, McGill Daily, January 31, 2006, <http://www.mcgilldaily.com/view.php?aid=4760>).

“An estimated half million female fetuses are aborted annually by parents in India who are desperate for more economically beneficial boys, according to new research. That translates into at least 10 million ‘missing girls’ since ultrasounds and other sex-selection tests became available two decades ago—a striking example of modern technology facilitating age-old prejudices.” (Source: “Sex-selection tests in India mean fewer girls, study says,” Andrea Picard, The Globe and Mail, September 1, 2006.)

“Ms. John [director of the Centre for Women and Development Studies in New Delhi] said the widespread aborting of female fetuses poses a dilemma for feminists, who argue that choice is a fundamental reproductive right for women. ‘Now we’re seeing the question of choice being used in an entirely different way.’” (Source: “‘Missing girls’ phenomenon on rise in India,” Don Butler, The Ottawa Citizen, March 6, 2007)

...in China

“‘In eight to 10 years, we will have something like 40 to 60 million missing women,’ [U.N. resident coordinator Khalid Malik] said, adding that it will have ‘enormous implications’ for China’s prostitution industry and human trafficking. (Source: “China grapples with legacy of its ‘missing girls,’” Eric Baculaino, NBC News, September 14, 2004, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5953508>)

“From a relatively normal ratio of 108.5 boys to 100 girls in the early 80s, the male surplus progressively rose to 111 in 1990, 116 in 2000, and is now is close to 120 boys for each 100 girls at the present time, according to a Chinese think-tank report.... ‘Prenatal sex selection was probably the primary cause, if not the sole cause, for the continuous rise of the sex ratio at birth,’ said population expert Prof. Chu Junhong.” (Source: “China grapples with legacy of its ‘missing girls,’” Eric Baculaino, NBC News, September 14, 2004, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5953508>)

... in Canada

“The controversy over sex-selected abortions erupted in B.C. in 1993, when two Indo-Canadian newspapers refused to pull ads for a clinic that was offering ultrasounds to determine fetal sex...South Asian communities in Ontario and B.C. apparently are very big users of the services,” Manjit Singh, a founding director of Canadian Sikh Council, said. ‘Cultural norms don’t change just because you happen to move from one part of the world to another part of the world.’” (Source: “Selective abortion blamed for missing girls: Canadian research claims as many as 10 million girls and women are missing in India due to sex selection before birth,” Sharon Kirkey, CanWest News Service, September 1, 2006)

“... as health workers in the Indo-Canadian community will affirm, some immigrants from India have brought with them the traditional desire to have boys rather than girls, and that has meant severe family pressure to arrange abortions -- unacceptable bullying that can’t help traumatizing the women. The issue arose recently when a teacher in Mississauga, Ont., noticed there were few girls of Indian origin in a local public school, despite its being in a hub of immigrants from India. Liberal MP Navdeep Singh Bains, who represents Mississauga-Brampton South, calls it a ‘sensitive issue, but one we need to address.’” (Source: Editorial, The Globe and Mail, January 22, 2007).

“Mother Nature accounts for the higher male mortality rate by producing, under normal circumstances, 105 boys for every 100 girls. But in Surrey...where the total population of nearly 350,000 includes 114,725 immigrants—35,380, or nearly a third, of whom are from India—the number is dramatically different. In 2003, instead of 105 boys to every girl, there were 109. In 2000, it was nearly 111...

In Coquitlam, B.C., where Chinese immigrants currently make up 12 per cent of the population, for every 100 girls born in 2003, there were 112 boys. In 2001, it was 109, and in 2000, there was a startling 16 per cent gap—116 boys to 100 girls. It’s the same story in Richmond, B.C. In the city of 164,345, roughly 64,270 people arrived via China or Hong Kong. There, it was 112 baby boys to every 100 girls in 2003. In 2000, the ratio was 111 to 100. In 1997, 114 to 100.

In areas around Toronto boasting large clusters of arrivals from India and China, the numbers are every bit as aberrant. In north Etobicoke, where the population is made up of large numbers of Indian immigrants, the 2001 boy-to-girl ratio for kids under age 4 was 110 to 100. In heavily Sikh areas of Brampton, parents had 109 boys to every 100 girls. In the neighbourhood encompassing Toronto’s eastern Chinatown, 108 boys to 100 girls.” (Source: “Canada’s lost daughters,” Andrea Mrozek, Western Standard, June 5, 2006)

Commenting on Canada’s Assisted Human Reproduction Law prohibiting sex-selection of in-vitro embryos: “Francoise Baylis, a professor of bioethics and philosophy at Dalhousie University, vehemently supports the Canadian stance, enacted in 2004. ‘I think that there are many feminist scholars who would say that sex selection ultimately undermines equality between the sexes,’ she said from Halifax. ‘It is primarily discriminatory towards women and female children. And we do in Canada recognize a societal obligation to promote equality and it’s on those grounds that one would oppose sex discrimination ... Sex selection is ultimately about sex discrimination, therefore it’s a public policy issue, it is not a private choice.’” (Source: “Gender selection: Parents use U.S. clinic to choose babies’ sex,” Anne-Marie Tobin, Canadian Press, December 12, 2005)

Possible consequences of gender imbalance

“The large cohorts of ‘surplus’ males now reaching adulthood are predominantly of low socioeconomic class, and concerns have been expressed that their lack of marriageability, and consequent marginalization in society, may lead to antisocial behavior and violence, threatening societal stability and security.” (Source: “Abnormal sex ratios in human populations: Causes and consequences,” Therese Hesketh and Zhu Wei Xing, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, August 28, 2006, <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/103/36/13271>)

“The sheer numbers of surplus males raises the specter of a host of social problems, including female trafficking and other forms of crime as well as assorted public health issues.”

(Source: “China's unbalanced sex ratios: Politics and Policy Response” by Yanzhong Huang and Dali L. Yang, The Chinese Historical Review, Spring 2006 http://www.daliyang.com/files/Huang_and_Yang_Unbalanced_Sex_Ratios_in_China.pdf)

“Existing global issues of gender imbalance...compounded with the feminization of poverty, render women and children, in particular, prime candidates for trafficking.” (Source: MPHP 439: Health Policy and Management, Part I: Human Trafficking, April 25, 2006, By Sharlin Mikhaila Noble http://www.case.edu/med/epidbio/mphp439/Human_Trafficking.htm)

Public Opinion

“86% of those polled oppose sex-selection abortions and say they should be illegal while just 10 percent say they should be legal. (Source: “New Zogby Poll: Americans Increasingly Favor Pro-Life Positions,” LifeNews.com, March 27, 2006, <http://www.lifenews.com/nat2164.html>)

“New Reproductive Technologies released a report in 1993 showing 90 per cent of Canadians were uncomfortable with sex-selection abortions (of either gender).” .” (Source: “Canada’s lost daughters,” Andrea Mrozek, Western Standard, June 5, 2006)

Medical Organizations

“...the global impact of the desire to achieve sex selection has resulted in systematic rights abuses such as selective abortion of female foetuses, female infanticide, neglect of girl children and failure to provide either access to or support for health care of girls.” (Source: “Resolution on Sex-Selection for Non-medical Purposes,” adopted November 7, 2006 by the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics, http://www.figo.org/initiatives_sex_selection.asp)

Reacting to news that fetal gender testing kits are available for purchase over the Internet, “Dr. Andre Lalonde, vice-president of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, said it’s a slippery slope.

In China and India, earlier prenatal testing coincided with a spike in the birth rate of boys, as female fetuses are frequently aborted. He worries the same thing could happen in Canada.

‘I see this as designer medicine, and I don't think our society is very keen on that,’ Dr. Lalonde said.” (Source: “Controversial fetal gender test stirs fears,” Rebecca Dube, The Globe and Mail, May 8, 2007)

Policies / Laws in Canada

“There are a number of organizations that have formal statements that provide that the use of ultrasound for entertainment or fetal gender determination purposes is inappropriate. Health Canada, the Ontario Association of Radiologists, the Canadian Association of Radiologists, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, the Canadian Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers, and the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine are just some of the organizations that oppose the use of ultrasound for these purposes.

...The use of ultrasound only to view the fetus to obtain a picture or video of the fetus or to determine the gender of the fetus without a medical indication is inappropriate and contrary to good medical practice. (Source: College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario’s policy on Ultrasounds for non-medical reasons, July/August 2004, <http://www.cpso.on.ca/policies/ultrasound.htm>)

“Determination of fetal sex for the purpose of sex selection procedures on a non-medical basis is inappropriate.” (Source: “Canadian guidelines for prenatal diagnosis, JOGC Clinical Practice Guidelines, July 2001, <http://www.sogc.org/guidelines/public/105E-CPG2-July2001.pdf>)

“The College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia endorses the recommendation of the Commission on New Reproductive Technology that fetal gender determination for non-medical purposes is unethical.

The Commission states that ‘sexing’: ‘(a) departs from the major goal of prenatal diagnosis, namely, the prevention of serious genetic disease, and thus is not medically indicated; (b) violates the principle of equity between males and females; (c) sets a precedent for other ‘eugenic’ decisions that are socially repugnant; and (d) employs costly and scarce medical resources for a private purpose.’

When ultrasounds are conducted for appropriate clinical indications, the gender of the fetus should not be disclosed unless the fetus is more than 20 weeks gestation and the information has been specifically requested by the parent.” (Source: College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia’s policy on Fetal Sex Determination, https://www.cpsbc.ca/cps/physician_resources/publications/resource_manual/fetalsex)

“No person shall knowingly...for the purpose of creating a human being, perform any procedure or provide, prescribe or administer any thing that would ensure or increase the probability that an embryo will be of a particular sex, or that would identify the sex of an *in vitro* embryo, except to prevent, diagnose or treat a sex-linked disorder or disease” (Source: *Assisted Human Reproduction Act 2004*, Section 5(1)(e))

Confronting the problem

“Certainly community leaders should spread the word that gender equality is fundamental to Canadian law and social behaviour and that anti-female attitudes should be checked at the door. India itself passed a law in 1994 to ban the use of pre-natal tests for sex determination, though violations continue.” (Source: Editorial, *The Globe and Mail*, January 22, 2007).

“Measures to reduce sex selection must include strict enforcement of existing legislation, the ensuring of equal rights for women, and public awareness campaigns about the dangers of gender imbalance.” ((Source: “Abnormal sex ratios in human populations: Causes and consequences,” Therese Hesketh and Zhu Wei Xing, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, August 28, 2006, <http://www.pnas.org/cgi/content/full/103/36/13271>)

“...in making decisions about whether to allow or prohibit the use of sex-selection technology, we must look beyond the personal preferences of people who want a child only of a certain sex and ask what impact helping them to fulfill that goal would have on society and its values. And we must

consider the moral risks involved, not just the physical risks. There is an infinite difference between parents who want a child only if it comes into the world satisfying specific criteria for quality or gender, and parents welcoming the child they beget in a spirit of humility and with unconditional love, which they understand as the primary characteristic of the parent-child bond. These two approaches reflect diametrically opposed values. We cannot avoid the fact that our choice for one approach over the other will necessarily establish the corresponding societal values.” (Source: “Biotechnology and the Human Spirit: Facing the unprecedented challenge of rerogenetics,” Professor Margaret Somerville, <http://www.appliedforesight.org/cloning5.html>)

“The Commission urges Governments to take the following actions:

...Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which results in harmful and unethical practices regarding **female infanticide and prenatal sex selection**, which may have significant repercussions on society as a whole.” (Source: Commission on the Status of Women Fifty-first session, 26 February – 9 March 2007, “Agreed Conclusions: Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.”)