

# **A GIRL'S RIGHT TO LIVE**

## **Female Foeticide and Girl Infanticide**

### **Working Group on the Girl Child**

**NGO Committee on the Status of Women – Geneva**

**Conference of NGOs with Consultative Status with the United Nations (CONGO)**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of girl infanticide, or the murder of children because they are female, is of growing concern in contemporary society worldwide. This violation of a girl's basic right to life requires urgent attention and action. The following report, drafted by members of the Working Group on the Girl Child (part of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva), focuses on two main areas: the right to be born (female foeticide) and the right to live (girl infanticide). The Working Group recognizes these two areas as being of particular importance in the education of the concerned societies. This report also identifies many of the root causes of girl infanticide in the private and public sphere of society, thus identifying specific actions to be taken.

The publication and presentation of this report is to coincide with the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women meeting in New York (26 February to 9 March 2007) focusing on the “**Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child**”. This is hoped that this report will serve as an educational and working tool for civil society, social entrepreneurs, other NGOs and the interfaith community to help them speak out against girl infanticide. Through this report, the Working Group also calls upon governments to get more involved in developing and promoting effective policies to bring an end to the girls' human rights violation of girl infanticide, everywhere in the world.

## **I. MAGNITUDE**

Girl children are undesirable in many regions of the world. In fact, due to the high occurrence of foeticides, infanticides, including newborn neglect and abandonment, the world is currently deprived of over 100 million women. China and India alone are responsible for 80 million missing females. The first warning against this scourge was voiced in 1990 by Amartya Sen – an Indian 1998 Nobel Prize winner in Economy – though since that time the situation has worsened. Economic modernisation has exacerbated the phenomenon. Wealth and economic development do not reduce son preference according to Rohini Pande and Anju Malhotra<sup>1</sup>. Isabelle Attané<sup>2</sup> further states that the economic and social liberalization of China has strengthened the traditional social power structure which is detrimental to women. The use of medical technology for sex selection and abortion has become a lucrative

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<sup>1</sup> Son Preference and Daughter Neglect in India, International Center for Research on Women, 2006, 30th anniversary

<sup>2</sup> Isabelle Attané, L'Asie manque de Femmes, Le Monde Diplomatique, July 2006

business. Finally, the girl deficit is more common among educated women and wealthier families.

Female foeticide, the practice of sex-selective abortions, has taken over infanticide, the practice of killing children at birth. Female foeticide is now practiced in different parts of the world but is most prevalent in Southern Asia. This section of the report will consider the magnitude of the problem, the root causes and the consequences of all “missing girls”. Finally, we will look at means of enforcing national laws and changing mentalities in order to reassess girls’ most basic human right – the right to life.

### **1. Female Foeticide**

The biological norm for birth ratios is about 105 boys born for every 100 girls worldwide. This norm has been drastically altered in some Asian countries such as China and India where the sex-ratio has been skewed since the mid-1980s. In China and India, an average of respectively 117 and 120 boys are born for every 100 girls. The birth ratio has reached 133 boys born for every 100 girls in certain Chinese provinces as well as in New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Punjab and Haryana in India. These two countries are joined by Pakistan, Bangladesh, Taiwan, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia) where female foeticide is also practiced<sup>3</sup>. Given that these countries account for nearly half of the world’s population (3 out of the world’s 6.5 billion inhabitants), the killing of girls in these countries means fewer wives and mothers for future generations and, as a result, a significant increase in the imbalance of the number of men and women in the world.

#### **India**

Female infanticide has been practised in India for thousands of years, but with the increased availability of modern sex determination techniques such as amniocentesis, ultrasound and trans-vaginal probes, sex-selective abortion has become common in most of India’s big cities. In 1990, there were 25 million more males than females in India and by 2001 the gender gap had risen to 35 million. Experts now estimate that it may reach 50 million.

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<sup>3</sup> Isabelle Attané, *Une Chine sans Femmes ?*, Perrin, Paris 2005

Compared to 1991 when only two districts - Salem and Bhind - had an adverse female sex ratio, as many as 51 districts in India now have more male babies born compared to female, according to UNICEF. "In 80 per cent of districts in India, the situation is getting worse".<sup>4</sup>

- According to the UNFPA 2003 statistics, there were 770 girls counted for every 1000 boys in the district of Haryana (one of India richest states), 814 girls in Ahmadabad (Gujarat), and 845 in South West Delhi.
- According to the Christian Medical Association of India<sup>5</sup> in New Delhi when the third child coming after 2 previous girls is a female foetus, 70% of them are aborted leading to 219 girls for every 1000 boys born. When the first child born is a girl, the birth ratio becomes 558 girls born for every 1000 boys.
- According to the British medical journal The Lancet (9 January 2006), over 10 million female fetuses (1 in every 25) have been aborted in India since 1994. The journal also reports that prenatal sex-selection in India causes the loss of 500,000 girls per year.

## **China**

In 2000, 138 boys were born for every 100 girls in the provinces of Jiangxi and Guangdong, which is 30% above the biological norm.

## **Caucasus**

In 2005, 115 boys were born for every 100 girls in Azerbaidjan, and respectively 118 and 120 boys for 100 girls in Georgia and Armenia. This points to an alarmingly increasing trend in female foeticide given that in 1995 the biological birth ratios in these countries were recorded as stable.

## **2. Girl Infanticide**

Discrimination does not end with the sex-selective abortion of female foetus. In most cases, it continues beyond birth. Despite the progress made due to government-run programmes for instance in India, the girl child continues to lack adequate nutrition, healthcare, education and maternal care. The child mortality data indicates that a larger number of female children do

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<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, 2007 World's Children Report

<sup>5</sup> Christian forum alarmed at female foeticides in Indian capital, Anto Akkara, Ecumenical News International, 18 July 2005

not reach the age of five. And India and China are among the countries where boys far outnumber girls at age five, as reported by UNICEF<sup>6</sup>.

## FORMS OF INFANTICIDE

The crude methods of eliminating girl babies after birth include poisoning, throat splitting, starvation, smothering and drowning which illustrate the insignificance accorded to these young female lives<sup>7</sup>.

Cases of female infanticide in Indian North Arrot villages were often reported as natural deaths or still births. Some parents have even succeeded in having false death certificates issued after bribing doctors. The bodies of the infant girls are then burned to destroy any evidence. Further when evidence surfaced that people were poisoning their girl children, they began to adopt methods such as starving the baby to death<sup>8</sup>.

Many other girl children are disposed of, often in garbage dumps. Although some girls are found and revived, most die.

Brutal treatments of mothers and newborn girls have been reported in cases where a daughter is born instead of the desired son<sup>9</sup>. The mother and newly born baby are treated badly because they are viewed as a burden and often receive no medical care.

Eighty to ninety percent of victims of female infanticide are girls of higher birth order (when there are more than two in a family). The girls who survive are likely to suffer neglect as parents often do not hide their contempt for these girls. Most of the killings of these infant girls are committed by senior women in the family.

Each year the number of girls who die is higher than boys. This is an unnatural phenomenon caused, in part, by girl infanticide. A 2001 National Family Health survey in India showed that post neonatal mortality is 13 percent higher for females than for males. Child mortality figures were 43 percent higher for females than for males. Yet, the scientific facts show that genetically girls are considered stronger and more resilient than boys at the time of birth. The

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<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, op.cit.

<sup>7</sup> Gendercide Watch, Female infanticide 2000 p.1-9

<sup>8</sup> Nielsen, Liljestrand, Hadegaard British Medical Journal 1997, 24 May, vol 314:1521

<sup>9</sup> PHREB, Bangladesh, 2005

abnormal mortality rates, therefore, have to be affected by the tragic reality of girl infanticide, including neglect and abandonment.

Many girls who are granted the right to be born are then denied the right to basic life-sustaining nutrition and health and are instead neglected by their families and communities. The resulting ill health of the child often leads to death.

Studies have shown that neglect and abandonment during the first few years of life leave a lasting mark on a child's life, and can often result in the death of the child<sup>10</sup>. Girl children, in particular, are often victims of deadly neglect and abandonment due to culture, tradition, religious beliefs and social attitudes that continue to make girls vulnerable in the family and the community. In many countries, the girl child endures a low social status that results in fewer rights and benefits than the boy child. In those countries, the issue of adequate food and basic living conditions necessary for the survival of the girl child is of little concern to the members of the communities. These social customs tend to give preference to boys.

Tens of thousands of unwanted baby girls are abandoned in China. Some of the abandoned girls are admitted to the nation's overcrowded orphanages that cannot sufficiently care for the girls<sup>11</sup>. The likelihood of survival beyond one year for newly admitted orphans in China's welfare system was less than 50 percent, although these girls can be subjected to starvation, torture and sexual assault over many years, leading to unnatural deaths<sup>12</sup>.

## **II. ROOT CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

The root causes leading to female foeticide are complex and reflect diverse political, economical, social, cultural and religious practices, none of which justify such a violation of human rights.

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<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, 2000 State of the world's children

<sup>11</sup> WHO world report on Violence, 1999

<sup>12</sup> Death by Default, Human Rights Watch, January 1996

## 1. Cultural Factors

### **India**

India has an age old fascination with the boy child. The culture in India is profoundly patriarchal and is a feudal society where women are neither seen nor heard. There is societal pressure for women to have male children and as a result women are often considered failures and tend to feel guilty after giving birth to a girl. Women who are considered to have less value because they did not give their husbands a son are at risk of being beaten and rejected by their husbands. Giving birth to a girl can lead to rejection by in-laws and by the community as a whole. “If you don’t kill your girl, you are rejected by the community and/or by your in-laws” according to Manjeet Rathee, an English teacher.<sup>13</sup>

In the Hindu religion, the son is responsible for lighting his parents’ pyre, in order for them to reach Nirvana, and having only girls in the family amounts to being condemned to a lower caste in the next world. In Punjab – where the illiteracy rate is close to 70 percent – there are places of worship called “Son temples,” exclusively for people who want a male child.

The superstitions are various and some are very detrimental to girls. For example, ‘Blessings and curses’ of Eunuchs, who travel from village to village to curse mothers who have girls while blessing those with baby boys. Another superstition is that if the first child is a girl and that girl is killed, the next child will be a boy.

### **China**

#### *Historical Chinese marriage customs*

“Ever since ancient times, there has been a saying that the three most delightful moments in one’s life come with success in the imperial examination, marriage and the birth of a son”<sup>14</sup>.

In Confucianism, sons (and particularly the eldest) are responsible for the ancestors’ cult.

#### *One-Child Policy in China*

There are 80 million one-child families<sup>15</sup> and the son preference is particularly prevalent in rural areas, which has led to forced abortion and sterilization. China remains unwilling to give up this policy despite the recognition that it exacerbates the trend to abort female fetuses.

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<sup>13</sup> The Sunday Observer, Ranjit Devraj, 27 July 2003

<sup>14</sup> Historical Chinese Marriage Customs in Travel China Guide, last updated, 25 December 2006

<sup>15</sup> Xinhua, Gender Imbalance in Birth rate, 12 July 2006

## **2. Social and Economic Factors**

Among the factors which lead to a consideration of females as less valuable, the following are of special importance:

- **Inheritance:** In many regions of rural India there is a strict social taboo on a daughter inheriting land, since if she does so the land is lost by her father's lineage. If a woman attempted to exercise her legal claim to her share of her parents' immovable property, she would be likely to lose the affection of her brothers together with their sense of obligation to support her in a family emergency or in the event she is widowed without sons. The recent Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005 which deleted the gender discriminatory clause on agricultural land only benefits Hindu women leaving intact the obstacle faced by non-Hindu women.

- Furthermore women in many rural areas are economically reliant on men who are traditionally the breadwinners, custom which in turn impacts the imbalance in the employment sector.

- Having a boy allows the father to achieve better status in society, whereas having a baby girl is seen as a curse.

- Not only has the girl child been traditionally considered inferior to boys (she only does domestic chores) but also as a liability – a bride's dowry can financially cripple a poor family. Moreover, the dowry practice can deteriorate into a method of extortion of wealth from the bride's to the groom's parents, leaving many daughters' parents in debt.

- "Raising a daughter is like watering someone else's field": deep-rooted saying among rural people in China where elderly peasants traditionally can only depend on their sons.

Nevertheless, in the richest states like Haryana (India), sex-selective abortions are very common and also apply to well-educated women, for whom the girls' deficit is even twice as high as for illiterate women. So, illiteracy and poverty are not the only factors, though we know that much can be achieved through education and improved living conditions. There is evidence that although the dowry was banned in India in 1961, and the caste tradition has been abolished, all these customs are deeply rooted in society and still prevail.

In some other areas of Asia, humiliation and even death are often the punishments for a mother who gives birth to a girl, because of the economic hardship and social stigma caused by a female child.

### **3. Consequences**

Over the next 20 years, in parts of China and India there will be a 12 to 15 percent excess of young men leading to an obvious bride shortage: between 2015 and 2030 there will be 25 million men in China who have no hope of finding a wife<sup>16</sup>.

This can give rise to:

- A substantial increase in aggressions and organized crime
- Rape and other forms of violence against women
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Situation where all men of the family share the same wife.
- Women being viewed as commodities: for example kidnapping and trafficking of girls across borders.
- Inter-community trafficking, which is something relatively new, such as the “Paros” (women from the outside) phenomenon: women are easily bought just like commodities with a price range between 50 and 900 dollars; the younger the girl, the higher the price. According to UNIFEM, 45,000 “Paros” have been sold in and around Haryana (India) in 2006 alone.

UNICEF<sup>17</sup> has warned that “the alarming decline in the child sex-ratio is likely to result in more girls being married at a younger age, more girls dropping out of education, increased mortality as a result of early child bearing and an associate increase in acts of violence against girls and women such as rape, abduction, trafficking and forced polyandry”.

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<sup>16</sup> Isabelle Attané, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF, 2007 op.cit.

In a near future, we could see what Amin Maalouf describes in his book *“Le premier siècle après Béatrice”*:

**“Today the social flaw of the male cult could become collective suicide”. We would therefore witness the “auto-genocide of the misogynous populations”<sup>18</sup>.**

### **III. POSITIVE INITIATIVES**

Results in some countries are encouraging:

#### **1. India**

In 1994, India not only banned the misuse of ultrasound and other medical techniques but also condemned sex determination as a criminal offence.

Nevertheless, foeticide is still practiced due to the enormous family and social pressures to produce males. Moreover, they have only bolstered patriarchal values further undermining the status of women:

- Private clinics still openly advertise the services of sex determination.
- Obstetricians invest in mobile clinics with ultrasound equipment that can be driven into remote rural areas where the preference for male offspring runs high.
- Kits from the U.S. are available that allow women to know the sex of their baby in the comfort of their home.
- Abortion is so lucrative that many doctors do not want to see it curtailed. As a result, 11.2 million illegal abortions are performed each year off-the-record.
- Medical groups also argue that technology used to monitor foetal health – such as ultrasound scans and amniocentesis – cannot be put under such intense scrutiny.
- Officials in India say that the phenomenon has become uncontrollable. The reason may also be that “it suits so many people.”

In the district of Salem (Tamil Nadu), government schemes suggest that parents should not kill their unwanted girls but abandon them in cradles where 621 babies were left in 2005.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Amin Maalouf, *Le Premier siècle après Béatrice*, Grasset, Paris, 1992

<sup>19</sup> According to Rohini Mohan, CNN IBN 2006

But charities feel this encourages people to throw away babies. In fact, how can such a system that reinforces son preference continue to be promoted?

Many poor families with girls in India were given financial incentives in the name of the infant girls. But like the “cradle baby” scheme, “girl protection schemes” were more the result of political plotting and, therefore, were short-lived even though girl child lives were spared because of those measures<sup>20</sup>.

On a more positive note, the Indian State Chief Minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda declared 2006 the Year of the Girl Child. He introduced an innovative incentive program called "Ladli" or the "adored one", carrying an incentive of Rs 5000 (\$100) per year for five years on the birth of a second daughter in a family. If a family has one daughter or only daughters, the parents would be entitled to get old age allowance of Rs300 (\$6) per month after the age of 55. Financial perks are indeed alluring incentives<sup>21</sup>.

Where NGOs accompany young mothers and their baby girls from birth to the age of 2 months, giving them food and support, mothers become attached to their daughters and in some places infanticide has decreased up to fifty percent within 10 years<sup>22</sup>.

That is why organising “Support groups” with mothers from different backgrounds or ages (mothers in law, young brides, grand-mothers...) to discuss about the issue of the girl child appears to have a very positive impact.

However, the challenge remains:

Decades of policy efforts have not achieved positive change. In fact the worsening ratios indicate that the situation is deteriorating rather than improving. Today, the focus of most Indian government policies related to son preference has been on reducing sex-selective abortions, but with little or no result.

UNICEF<sup>23</sup> notes that while the pre-natal diagnostic testing legislation has been passed in India, the enforcement is lagging with only one conviction to date.

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<sup>20</sup> Kirubhakaran, Social Welfare Program, 1993

<sup>21</sup> Anuj Chopra, Gulf News, Weekend Review, 31 August 2006

<sup>22</sup> Documentary broadcast on TV Channel ARTE: “La malédiction de naître fille” THEMA, 24 October 2006

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF: op.ci

Female foeticide can be considered as a mass crime facilitated by the medical community. Local initiatives by NGOs are to be encouraged as they do wonderful work on the ground and have the ability to save many lives.

## **2. China**

The program “Care for Girls” was launched by the State Population and Family Planning Commission in 2003 in 24 pilot countries. This program provides social benefits, including cash payments, to families with only girls in order to enhance the status of girls and women. Through such measures, some Chinese families have come out of poverty as they are entitled to accommodation and pensions when they get old. These families begin to feel more confident in the future and become less afraid of having girls<sup>24</sup>.

Kong Dehong, a 77<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of Confucius has recently declared: “In feudal society men were superior to women. I guess that is why women were not qualified to be included in the family tree. Our women are equal now. We have to adapt to the times.” So, there has been a change and we hope that this big step will have an effect on reducing the discrimination of the girl child<sup>25</sup>.

## **3. Other Countries**

### **South Korea**

Government policies in South Korea have also succeeded in reversing the trend quite rapidly. From the mid-nineties, the government took measures to reverse this trend with positive results so that the girl vs. boy ratio is almost back to normal. There is evidence here that political will is of prime importance in achieving desired results. Enforcing laws and implementing policies are possible as long as all participants pursue the same objective<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> China promotes girls to avoid glut of bachelors, China Daily, 08 August 2006

<sup>25</sup> Jane Macartney, The Times UK, 28 September 2006

<sup>26</sup> Isabelle Attané, op.cit.

## **The Philippines**

In the Philippines, an anti-child abuse, discrimination and exploitation division was established<sup>27</sup>. A children's training workshop on the girl child was also held which celebrated a week for the protection and fair gender treatment of the girl child.

## **CONCLUSION**

The magnitude of the phenomena of female foeticide and girl infanticide in India, China and other parts of Asia has reached a critical level creating a worldwide demographic imbalance with, in turn, drastic economic and social consequences. Over 100 million women are now missing in Asia which will result in a 12 to 15 percent excess of young men in the next twenty years.

This report has argued that female foeticides or sex selective abortions, promoted by modern medical techniques, have dramatically increased in the last ten years thus exacerbating the killing of girls. Yet nothing can justify these killings.

As Swami Agnivesh, religious leader and social activist, said last year when talking about foeticides: "There's no other form of violence that's more painful, more abhorrent, more shameful".

Female foeticide not only denies the girl child her most basic human right - the right to be born - but it also turns women into silent victims. Scientific evidence has shown that mothers who have been put under pressure to kill their baby girls remain deeply hurt and injured for the rest of their lives as they cannot forget their own offspring.

This report has mainly focused on two areas on the killing of girls but other practices leading to the death of the girl child need to be mentioned:

"Honour" killing, usually defined as an act of murder in which a woman or a girl is killed for her actual or perceived immoral behaviour, tends to affect a large number of countries due to increasing migration. "Honour" killings are either decided and performed by the parents or relatives of the woman or girl or by the state as in the case of stoning. Such killings have been reported inter alia in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Britain, Ecuador, Egypt, France,

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<sup>27</sup> Reported by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Project, 2004

India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, the Palestinian Territories, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Uganda.

Sexual abuse of girl children is also often fatal and takes many forms including rape and sexual exploitation including the phenomenon of snuff movies<sup>28</sup> made possible through the misuse of new mediatechnologies. During war time rape is used as a weapon of war and as a way of durably humiliating the enemy, thus exacerbating violence. Contamination by HIV-AIDS of young “virgins” as a way of purification of the man is also leading to the death of very young girls.

Additionally, female genital mutilation and early marriage with its consequences of exceedingly young childbearing are practices which result in medical complications and often lead to the early death of the girl child.

It will take generations to change people’s mindset but the situation worldwide is so dramatic that we cannot afford to wait any longer. It is imperative that the International community calls on the governments and all actors responsible for this human and demographic tragedy to enact laws and take urgent measures to fight these violence and discrimination which, by denying the first basic right of all - the right to life - denies all other human rights.

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<sup>28</sup>Snuff movies are short films, generally of bad quality, showing a (supposedly) real murder, often preceded by pornography including women and child rape.

**Statement to CSW 51**

**Working Group on the Girl Child  
Of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva**

**Written statement to the 51<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women - 26  
February-9 March 2007**

Submitted and endorsed by the following NGOs:

Association Country Women of the World  
European Federation of Women Active in the Home - Fédération Européenne des Femmes Actives au Foyer  
Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas  
Femmes Africa Solidarité  
Institute for Family Policy  
Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices  
International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics  
International Council of Jewish Women  
International Council of Women - Conseil International des Femmes  
International Federation of University Women  
International Inner Wheel  
Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association International  
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom  
Women's International Zionist Organization  
Women's World Summit Foundation  
World Movement of Mothers - Mouvement Mondial des Mères  
World Union of Catholic Women's Organization  
Worldwide Organization for Women

We, the above named Non Governmental Organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC, through this statement and our report on girl infanticide and female foeticide that will be presented and distributed during the CSW in its 51<sup>st</sup> session, reaffirm and call attention to the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of the girl child. Despite the legal human rights framework and namely the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), we are deeply concerned with the phenomena of girl infanticide and female foeticide, which deny the girl child the most basic human right, the right to be born. Not only has the status of the girl child not improved but in many regions of the world, it has worsened and its future is threatened.

Girl infanticide, which consists of killing a baby girl at or very soon after birth is a traditional practice most common in India and China, but also spreading to other parts of Asia.

Female foeticide is a modern version of infanticide which consists of killing a female foetus via sex-selective abortions. Female foeticide, which has rapidly increased over the last decade, is even more perverse than girl infanticide in that modern technology has made it easier, more silent and an industry has developed to promote it.

Both these practices are based on the traditional belief that a girl is less valuable than a boy, and therefore is not worth living. Mainly due to cultural, religious or social factors and practices, such as dowry requirements and inheritance laws, having a girl child is still considered a burden or a failure in many countries. There is no rational explanation for this phenomenon, given the knowledge that sex-selective abortions are even more common in wealthier and educated families.

The magnitude of this human rights violation is building to a worrisome demographic imbalance with economical and social consequences worldwide:

- Killing of girls in the most populated countries means fewer wives and mothers and in turn, fewer girls and mothers for future generations resulting into a greater imbalance in the number of men and women in the world. Over 100 million women are missing, which will result in a 12 to 15 per cent excess of young men in the next twenty years and therefore a bride shortage. For example, between 2015 and 2030, 25 million Chinese will have no hope of finding a wife<sup>29</sup>.

- Trafficking of girls and women across borders and within communities is developing at an alarmingly high speed. This only enhances the traditional power structure detrimental to women: becoming seen as a commodity and therefore holding less value. The “paros” phenomenon or the import of “women from the outside” sadly illustrates this situation as girls are easily bought- and the younger the girl, the higher the price.

- Forced marriages are increasing dramatically, in some cases forcing young women into marrying and belonging to several men at the same time.

The phenomena of girl infanticide and female foeticide are alarming and this is the reason why we are calling upon the UN Commission on the Status of Women, in its 51st session focusing on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child to:

- Reaffirm the equal dignity of men and women, and especially the right to be born.

We also call upon the UN CSW to request political commitment from governments to:

- strengthen and implement laws against girl infanticide;
- amend laws that create and support the conditions where women are seen as a burden, such as inheritance laws and dowry requirements;
- create an environment favorable to girls, for example by giving allowances to families who welcome girls;
- provide education on gender equality;
- support good local initiatives from NGOs which support families with girl children from pregnancy onwards.

Madame Chair, nothing can justify the mass-killing, torture, ill-treatment or sale of girls. We expect that at this UN CSW, a recommendation will be adopted to address this deplorable situation.

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<sup>29</sup> Isabelle Attané, Une Chine sans Femmes ?, Perrin, Paris 2005 and L'Asie manque de Femmes, article from Le Monde Diplomatique, July 2006

**Reference to Major Treaties and Other Documents**

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and its optional protocols (2000).
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), and its optional protocol (1999).
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966).
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995).
- “Beijing +5” Political Declaration and Outcome Document (2000) and all follow up, including the CSW Special Session “Beijing +10” (2005).
- Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000).
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).
- Charter of the United Nations (1947).

## Summary

### **Principal causes for female foeticide and girl infanticide**

- Traditions:
  - social pressure stronger than law
  - girls considered as a useless economic burden
  - misunderstanding of the importance of the committed crime
  - non respect of women's rights
  - exclusion of women from their societies if traditions are not followed
  - superstition, religious beliefs
- Illiteracy:
  - ignorance of the human body and the way it functions
  - ignorance of the laws in force
- Poverty

### **Principal consequences of female foeticide and girl infanticide**

- For women:
  - high risk of death
  - high risk of disease / malformation
  - mental traumatism
- For society:

Demographic imbalance (ex. villages of bachelors in India, lack of young women in age of marriage in China, etc...); this creating, among other things, violence, alcoholism, theft, depression, drugs and rape.

### Actions / Recommendations

Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should:

- make sure that:
  - o national governments implement international treaties;
  - o local governments are aware of women's and girls' rights;
  - o co-operation and information-sharing within the NGO community are facilitated.
- draw the attention of professional bodies (doctors, lawyers, social workers, etc..) to women and girls' human rights and make them aware of equal rights between men and women.
- urge heads of different religious communities in the world to contribute toward making traditions evolve according to the Beijing Platform for Action.
- support village (community) education committees with the help of specially trained educators in girls' rights.
- promote programs including "gender equality" for teachers training children and adults.
- educate men/women, boys/girls to have a better understanding of the specific needs or situations of women and girls (health, nutrition, security, empowerment...).
- reinforce girls' educational skills to empower them to become more self reliant and thus less vulnerable to conditions which can lead to death.
- better support mothers through the establishment of feeding programs so girls can flourish.
- urge governments to:
  - o review and implement laws concerning sanctions for infanticide.
  - o foresee special allowances in the case of female birth.

***Without girls... no society***



## **Working Group on the Girl Child**

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