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MESECVI Committee of Experts  
Lima, Peru

Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life Global Outreach (MCCL GO) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Twelfth Meeting of the Committee of Experts of the MESECVI. Violence against women is an ongoing problem that calls for serious international attention and commitment.

We urge the Committee to recognize that the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (the Belém do Pará Convention) does not create any right to abortion. On the contrary, the American Convention on Human Rights explicitly protects the right to life of human beings *in utero*. It states, “Every person has the right to have his life respected. This right shall be protected by law and, in general, *from the moment of conception*. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life” (Article 4.1). The Committee should not encourage States Parties to legalize the killing of unborn children. Abortion is a human rights violation and a form of violence—often against female children.

Legalized abortion is not necessary to ensure maternal health, which depends on the quality of medical care (and related factors) rather than on the legal status or availability of abortion. After Chile prohibited abortion in 1989, for example, its maternal mortality ratio continued to decline significantly and at about the same rate, dropping 69.2 percent over the next 14 years, according to a 2012 study published in *PLOS ONE*. Even maternal deaths due specifically to abortion declined—from 10.78 abortion deaths per 100,000 live births in 1989 to 0.83 in 2007, a reduction of 92.3 percent after abortion was made illegal. Women’s lives are saved by providing adequate nutrition, prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, emergency obstetric care, clean water and sanitation. Improvements in women’s education and the overall health care infrastructure are also tied to substantial reductions in maternal mortality.

Abortion inherently poses risks to the health of pregnant women. For example, a 2013 meta-analysis of 36 different Chinese studies published in *Cancer Causes and Control* determined that abortion increased the risk of breast cancer by 44 percent. A wealth of worldwide evidence has established that abortion substantially increases the risk of preterm birth in subsequent pregnancies; preterm birth is the leading cause of newborn mortality. And a 2011 meta-analysis in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* found an 81 percent increased risk of mental health problems among women who had undergone abortions. The medical risks of abortion are only exacerbated in countries where basic health care is lacking. These dangers to women should be acknowledged and taken into account.

The Convention of Belém do Pará states that special “consideration shall be given to women subjected to violence while pregnant” (Article 9). Pregnant women and new mothers are uniquely vulnerable to the threat of physical and emotional abuse, especially by partners and family members. Violence during pregnancy can also lead to pregnancy-related problems such as miscarriage and preterm birth, jeopardizing the lives and health of children. Women are sometimes pressured or coerced into choosing abortion. These problems deserve serious attention from the Committee.

MCCL GO thanks the Committee of Experts for the invitation to participate in this important meeting.