



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and  
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: “Fostering social development and social  
justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the  
implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable  
Development and to achieve the overarching goal of  
poverty eradication”**

### **Statement submitted by Concepts of Truth, Inc., 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

“Mental health is a growing public health priority and human rights imperative,” assert the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and the World Health Organization, and mental health reform requires that we “address the root causes of mental distress, trauma, and crisis.” *Mental Health, Human Rights and Legislation: Guidance and Practice* (October 2023). As the UN seeks to promote social development through mental health and well-being and fulfill its pledge to “leave no one behind,” it cannot turn a blind eye to a significant – but often disregarded – root cause of mental health disorders and trauma: reproductive loss.

Women, girls, men and families whose lives have been upturned by reproductive loss (i.e., abortion, miscarriage or still birth), have had their stories silenced by the clamor of ideology. Concepts of Truth, Inc. provides an international helpline to give these individuals a voice and provide them with access to sexual health resources and competent and caring counselors who communicate the truth about life, human dignity, responsibility and forgiveness to release them from the pain and guilt of past reproductive loss or sexual trauma and help them make informed choices for themselves and for future generations.

Concepts of Truth, Inc. has received calls from over 20,000 people world-wide, and nearly every day, the staff listens to the stories of callers descending into depression, self-harm, or suicide because no one had told them about the harsh realities of terminating a pregnancy or about the anguish of prenatal loss. Two recent callers who had chemical abortions report, “I feel guilty and can’t forgive myself;” “Life has never been the same;” “I saw parts of the aborted baby!” “I feel very sad, like I killed my baby.” A caller who recently suffered a surgical abortion said, “I have no one to talk to. I am so grieved.”

We recommend that member states choose between ideology and reality, between politics and poor health, and publicly recognize the harms of reproductive loss to promote the mental health and well-being of their citizens.

### **Fostering Social Development: Closing Gaps in Mental Health Policies**

Social development and the success of a society are strongly connected to the well-being of its citizens and well-being is inextricably linked to mental health. (SDG 3, Target 3.4) In 2019, 970 million people – one in eight, were living with a diagnosable mental disorder, with depression being the most prevalent disorder and women statistically exceeding men by 50 percent. In 2020, depression and anxiety rose by more than 25 percent in the wake of the pandemic, and in a recent study of 29 countries published in *The Lancet, Psychiatry*, p. 668 (Sep. 2023), one in two people will develop a mental disorder in their lifetime, with depression and anxiety among the most common. Although the estimated cost to the world economy from lost productivity due to mental health disorders will reach \$6 trillion by 2030, mental health continues to be consistently under-funded and under-treated. On average, countries dedicate less than 2% of their health care budgets to mental health, and most afflicted individuals do not receive any treatment. And for those that do receive treatment, mental health care typically fails to address root causes. World Health Organization. *World Mental Health Report* (2022).

### **Revisiting Social Policies: Acknowledging Reproductive Loss**

If member states genuinely seek to advance mental health, they must recognize that reproductive loss is a very significant root cause of mental illness and those whose lives are affected by it are at a substantially higher risk for depression, substance misuse and suicide. Reardon D. “The Abortion and Mental Health

Controversy: A Comprehensive Literature Review.” *SAGE Open Medical Journal*. (2018). One synthesis of 22 peer reviewed studies involving 877,181 women found that women who undergo an abortion have an 81 percent increased risk of mental health problems and are 55 percent more likely to exhibit suicidal behavior than those who do not abort. Coleman P. “Abortion and Mental Health: A Quantitative Synthesis and Analysis of Research.” *British Journal of Psychiatry* (2011).

Despite ideological efforts to discredit the wealth of scientific evidence, extensive global research establishes the significant negative short and long term physical and mental health impact of abortion, including the prevalence of immediate post-abortion hemorrhage, infertility, uterine/cervical lacerations, retained fetal body parts, breast cancer, and autoimmune disease as well as numerous psychiatric complications, including severe depression and suicide. Lanfranchi, A. Complications: Abortion’s Impact on Women, *DeVeber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research* (2015); Ferguson, D. “Abortion and Mental Health Disorders: Evidence from a 30-year Longitudinal Study.” *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 193 No. 6. (Dec. 2008). And women who feel moral conflict or pressure to abort are more likely to experience negative mental health reactions such as PTSD or moral injury. Coleman, P. “Women Who Suffered Emotionally From Abortion.” *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter 2017); Carleton, T. and Sondgrass, J. *The Development of Moral Injury Post Abortion*. (e-book, New York, August 2022).

Chemical abortions, which surged during the pandemic, present approximately *four times* the complication rate of surgical abortions. “Fact Sheet: Risks and Complications of Chemical Abortion.” *Charlotte Lozier Institute* (August 23, 2023). Significantly, in Texas, U.S. District Court Judge Mathew Kacsmaryk recently revoked regulatory approval for the widely used chemical abortion drug, mifepristone after acknowledging the Food and Drug Administration’s utter failure to study the psychological effects of its use. Judge Kacsmaryk concludes that given the “intense psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress from excessive bleeding and seeing the remains of their aborted children,” that women often experience from chemical abortion, the FDA’s omissions are bound to cause “lasting damage” to women who take the pill. *Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine v. U.S. Food and Drug Administration*, No. 23-10362 (5th Cir. 2023).

Miscarriage and still birth also carry significant mental health consequences. Miscarriage affects at least one in ten women with an estimated 23 million miscarriages each year. A recent meta-analysis examining 29 studies from 17 countries showed that miscarriage, like abortion, was associated with an increased risk of depressive/anxiety disorders, as well as with an increased risk of obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. Doyle, C. “Women’s Desires for Mental Health Support Following a Pregnancy Loss.” *General Hospital Psychiatry*, Vol. 84 (2023). As the World Health Organization recognizes, “many women who lose a baby in pregnancy can go on to develop mental health issues that last for months or years”. “Why We Need to Talk About Losing a Baby.” *Spotlight* (2023).

### **Establishing Social Justice: Reversing Discrimination and Stigma**

Many people who experience the mental distress of reproductive loss face discrimination, stigma or social opposition which increase their distress and reduce their ability to heal. As the World Health Organization proclaimed, “the unacceptable stigma and shame women face after baby loss must end.” WHO *Spotlight* (2023). In Africa and Asia for example, expressing grief over miscarriage and infant loss remains largely taboo due to cultural beliefs that sometimes get in the way of healing, says the African advocacy and counseling group, Still a Mum. Individuals who

perceive they are ostracized after some form of reproductive loss thus exhibit increased symptoms of post-traumatic stress and disenfranchised grief. Wasserman, E., and Parris, L. “Miscarriage, Perceived Ostracism, and Trauma.” *Frontiers in Psychology*. Vol. 12 (2022). More than ever, women – and men – need mental health support after pregnancy loss.

### **Recommendations**

Concepts of Truth advocates a person-centered human rights approach to mental health that:

- Acknowledges reproductive loss as a root cause of mental disorders;
  - Addresses the stigma, discrimination and opposition faced by victims of pregnancy loss;
  - Advances mental health services to promote healing; and
  - Supports the pillars of the Geneva Consensus Declaration to promote life and well-being for women and families.
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