

ABORTION

SERIES: TAKING A STAND

EXPLORING THE ARMY'S INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENTS

*Members of the International Moral and Social Issues Council (IMASIC) reflect on
The Salvation Army's International Positional Statements.*

STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army believes all people are created in the image of God and therefore have unique and intrinsic value. Human life is sacred and all people should be treated with dignity and respect. The Salvation Army accepts the moment of fertilisation as the start of human life. We believe that society has a responsibility to care for others, and especially to protect and promote the welfare of vulnerable people, including unborn children.

The Salvation Army believes that life is a gift from God and we are answerable to God for the taking of life. As such, The Salvation Army is concerned about the growing ready acceptance of abortion, which reflects insufficient concern for vulnerable persons including the unborn. We do not believe that genetic abnormalities that are identified in an unborn child who is likely to live longer than a brief period after birth are sufficient to warrant a termination of pregnancy.

The Salvation Army recognises tragic and perplexing circumstances that require difficult decisions regarding a pregnancy. Decisions should be made only after prayerful and thoughtful consideration, acknowledging the tremendous pressures that occur during an unexpected pregnancy.

There is a responsibility on all involved to give the parents of the unborn child, particularly the woman, appropriate pastoral, medical and other counsel.

The Salvation Army believes that termination can occur only when:

- Carrying the pregnancy further seriously threatens the life of the mother; or
- Reliable diagnostic procedures have identified a foetal abnormality considered incompatible with survival for more than a very brief postnatal period.

In addition, rape and incest are brutal acts of dominance violating women physically and emotionally. This situation represents a special case for the consideration of termination as the violation may be compounded by the continuation of the pregnancy.

The Salvation Army affirms and supports professional people engaged in the care of pregnant women who feel on religious, moral or ethical grounds that they cannot be involved in any way with the procuring or undertaking of an abortion.

**Download the complete International Positional Statement on
Abortion at salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips**

“The Salvation Army’s statement of position is strongly against abortion. It does not accept the ‘woman’s right to choose’ argument ...”

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 25 per cent of pregnancies end in abortion with 56 million induced abortions each year¹ – that’s 153,425 every day! These facts should be deeply worrying for people who believe unborn children are precious and made in the image of God.

Since the International Moral and Social Issues Council (IMASIC) was reformed in 2008, the General has approved 16 International Positional Statements (IPS) of The Salvation Army. The IPS that generated the most controversy was the one on abortion, approved in 2010. Some criticism came from Salvationists who believed the statement was too conservative, but most criticism came from people who viewed it as being too accepting of abortion.

The Salvation Army’s statement of position is strongly against abortion. It does not accept the ‘woman’s right to choose’ argument. The Salvation Army believes human life begins at fertilisation, and thereafter, human life should be treated with dignity and respect. Criticism of the IPS has been voiced about the extremely limited circumstances where an abortion may be the lesser evil. These limited circumstances have been included in Salvation Army positional statements since the 1980s.

The first limited circumstance is when ‘carrying the pregnancy further seriously threatens the life of the mother’. This exception is for extremely serious and limited situations where doctors are choosing between saving the life

of the mother or saving the life of the foetus. In these rare and tragic circumstances, The Salvation Army’s position is that the mother’s life may be given precedence. These circumstances are increasingly rare in well-equipped Western hospitals but may still regrettably occur in places where medical personnel do not have the resources available to save both lives.

The second limited regrettable and tragic circumstance when an abortion may be permitted is when ‘reliable diagnostic procedures have identified a foetal abnormality considered incompatible with survival for more than a very brief postnatal period’ – more than a few days maximum.

The IPS does not take a position on whether abortion is permitted in the case of rape, but it notes the deep, devastating impacts rape can have on women – especially when rape is used as a ‘weapon of war’ intended to humiliate both women and the whole community apparently too weak to defend themselves. Many women have been gang-raped. As a result, they not only carry unwarranted guilt, but are shunned by their families. The magnitude of this harm is hard to overestimate. In such circumstances, everyone should give unlimited love and understanding. A child conceived through violence, and without consent, is still a child. However, the manner of its creation was sinful. The child is not to blame, and neither is the mother. Much grace is needed to accept a child conceived under such circumstances. »

KEY FACTS ON INDUCED ABORTION WORLDWIDE

- On average, 56 million abortions occurred worldwide each year in 2010-2014. This is an increase from 50 million annually in 1990-1994, resulting primarily from population growth.
- Each year, globally, there were 35 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44 in 2010-2014, down slightly from 40 per 1,000 in 1990-1994.
- The abortion rate has declined markedly – by 41% – in developed countries since 1990, but has remained roughly the same in developing countries.
- Globally, 25% of all pregnancies ended in abortion in 2010-2014.
- In 2010-2014, 73% of all abortions worldwide, or 41 million annually, were obtained by married women.
- The abortion rate is not significantly different in countries where abortion is highly restricted than in those where abortion is broadly legal.
- Nearly 7 million women in developing countries are treated for complications from unsafe abortions annually, and at least 22,000 die from abortion-related complications every year.

Source: who.int/reproductivehealth/news/440KeyAbortionFactsFinal.pdf

¹ World Health Organization, who.int/reproductivehealth/news/abortion-rates/en/

**MAJOR DIANA MACDONALD**

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» PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM MAJOR DIANA MACDONALD

In many economically less-developed countries, women bear the brunt of unsafe pregnancies while men make all the decisions – even about abortion. Women want, at least, to have their opinion heard. In my country, Pakistan, abortion is illegal and only permissible when the life of a mother is at extreme medical risk. Whether it is a pre-marital teenage pregnancy leaving the young girl exposed to social stigma, or a rape survivor who has unfortunately been impregnated, or a married woman who already has many children – abortion is illegal. Despite the law, women undergo illegal abortion, especially in rural areas. A study reported that in 2012, 623,000 Pakistani women were treated for complications resulting from induced abortions.² The vast majority of abortions were performed by unqualified people or involved traditional methods.

I'd like to share a true story about a family who attend an urban corps in Pakistan. The couple had three beautiful daughters but were under pressure to have a boy. This is common in Pakistan because a male baby is seen as a blessing who will take the family name forward. When the mother became pregnant again, the family was really excited. An ultrasound scan revealed that the baby was another girl. The family was very upset, and the pregnant woman came under enormous pressure to have an abortion. She refused and recalled the dedication ceremony of a previous child. The

brave woman reminded her family of what the officer had said: 'Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward' (Psalm 127:3 NASB). She managed to convince the family and gave birth to a healthy baby girl.

In the Pakistan Territory, corps-based community development teams work, in line with the IPS on Abortion, to educate families about sexual and reproductive health, family planning and the consequences of abortion. We use Faith-Based Facilitation tools³ that empower women to have a say in the matters which affect their health and well-being.

Unsafe abortions can cause deaths, serious health complications and long-term disabilities, and place an enormous burden on national healthcare systems, the women, their families and communities. The Salvation Army in Pakistan is helping to minimise the dire consequences of abortion in many communities. The message is loud and clear: The Salvation Army upholds the dignity of pre-birth life.

ENDNOTES

² gutmacher.org/fact-sheet/unintended-pregnancy-and-induced-abortion-pakistan

³ *Building Deeper Relationships*, go to salvationarmy.org/fbf for download link, available in seven languages: English, French, Spanish, Indonesian, Mandarin, Swahili and Urdu.

**COMMISSIONER MARIE WILLERMARK**

Territorial Commander
Germany, Poland and Lithuania Territory

PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM COMMISSIONER MARIE WILLERMARK

Last year, a Christian group at a university in Germany invited a speaker to give a lecture about protecting the life of an unborn child. The university cancelled the room that the group had booked. Consequently, a Salvation Army hostel was asked to host the event. The venue's leader checked the message of the speaker with the IPS on Abortion and saw no conflict. The Salvation Army decided to host the event, although we knew activists were planning to demonstrate. We released a press statement saying we supported the democratic right for different opinions to be heard.

About 200 protesters turned up, plus approximately 40 police. The room held around 45 people. A few demonstrators got in and had to be removed by the police. The organisers kept calm. The event resulted in a small report in the local newspaper.

This example highlights the difficulties in discussing abortion in Europe. There is too much polarised activism and too little dialogue and reasoned argument. In highly secular societies, it is understandable that people outside the Church have less respect for arguments based on God's love and care for born and unborn humans. However, the above-mentioned event illustrates that Christians have to do more than cogently argue from their standpoint. We

**DR FELISTAS MAZHUDE**

A medical doctor and corps sergeant-major in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe
Zimbabwe and Botswana Territory

also need to take responsibility for guarding the democratic values of dialogue and respect.

Our mission is to remind the world of the power and meaning of words. For example, public health authorities use different words for the unborn child in different contexts. In the context of abortion, the foetus is 'a pregnancy that can be terminated'. On the other hand, parents are not informed that they will give birth to 'a pregnancy', but to a child. It disturbs me that we tend to hide ethical dilemmas behind words that oversimplify the matter. Although the situation for the woman (and the man involved) might be complicated and painful, we can all contribute to a society where the burden of the situation can be shared and eased in love and with respect.

PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM DR FELISTAS MAZHUDE

Dr Z: 'Mr C, your 16-year-old daughter is three months pregnant.' Mr C: 'Doctor, my child cannot carry this pregnancy to term. She is still at school and her final exams are coming up in one month. I teach at the school where she is a student. What are my colleagues going to say? What will her classmates say? I don't even want to know about the boyfriend who is responsible because we are going to get rid of this pregnancy.'

The pregnant 16-year old is not even given a chance to talk about what she thinks or feels.

This is just one of the many scenarios that I encounter in my profession as a doctor in the emergency department of a hospital.

In my country, Zimbabwe, abortion is illegal, except in the circumstances mentioned in The Salvation Army's IPS on Abortion. When I am faced with such a scenario, it is easy for me to say: 'Abortion is illegal. I cannot help.' However, the law does not stop women having abortions. There are doctors who, for the love of money, assist in the termination of pregnancies.

According to a report by UNICEF, more than 70,000 illegal abortions are carried out in Zimbabwe every year, with women running a 200-times greater risk of dying of abortion complications than their

counterparts in South Africa, where the procedure is legal.⁴

When a woman has an unwanted pregnancy, abortion may seem the best option. I have even seen married couples opt for abortion when contraceptives did not prevent pregnancy. Some married women have died from abortion complications and left children motherless.

Not only fear of complications should deter people from carrying out abortions. We should make choices based on what is right in the eyes of God. Paul writes: 'Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience' (2 Corinthians 5:11).

A message is always heard in the context of a person's character. That is why I have chosen to be beyond suspicion. I avoid anything that will make others think less, not of me, but of the message which God has given me – a message about the sacredness of life, caring for others, and especially protecting and promoting the welfare of vulnerable people, including unborn children.

ENDNOTES

⁴ pambazuka.org/governance/our-ugly-secret-abortion-zimbabwe-illegal-thriving