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Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations, addresses the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly at U.N. headquarters in New York City Sept. 26, 2023. In remarks during a high-level meeting at the U.N. Sept. 22, 2025, marking the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Gallagher said women throughout the world remain at high risk from poverty, violence and lack of access to health care, Gallagher said. (OSV News/Cia Pak, United Nations)

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Thirty years after a landmark international document safeguarding women's dignity, much remains to be done to ensure the well-being of women and girls worldwide, said a top Vatican diplomat.

On Sept. 22, Archbishop Paul Gallagher delivered an address at the United Nations' New York headquarters during the U.N.'s high-level meeting marking the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The 1995 gathering — held in Beijing and attended by more than 17,000 — consolidated efforts over the previous five decades to advance women's equality.

The conference produced the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a framework unanimously adopted by 189 countries to address the relationship between women and poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, economics, power, institutions, human rights, media and the environment.

The Beijing Declaration also highlighted specific issues impacting girls, such as female genital mutilation, female infanticide, child marriage and sexually based discrimination.

However, said Gallagher, despite "significant progress," several "persistent issues" cited in the declaration "remain unaddressed."

The archbishop — who serves as the Vatican's secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations — noted in particular "higher extreme poverty rate for women, obstacles to accessing or even exclusion of women from quality education, and their lower wages in the workforce.

According to the World Bank's 2024 "Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report" — which found that poverty eradication efforts have stalled over the past three decades — 8.5% of the global population lives in extreme poverty, surviving on less than $2.15 per day, with 44% of the global population living on $6.85 per day. As of 2024, one in every 10 women lives in extreme poverty, said UN Women.

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"These conditions impede the full achievement of women’s equal dignity and ability to fulfil their potential in all spheres of life," Gallagher said.

He also lamented the "continued prevalence of violence against women and girls," which he described as "deeply alarming."

UN Women reported that as of 2024, an estimated 736 million women have experienced physical or sexual violence or a combination thereof. More than 614 million live in areas affected by conflict, double the number since 2017, said the agency.

"Wherever it occurs, at home, during trafficking, or in conflict and humanitarian settings, it constitutes an affront to their dignity and is a grave injustice," said

the archbishop, adding that "regrettably, technology is also being used to exacerbate certain forms of abuse and violence."

He noted that "violence is not limited to sexual exploitation and trafficking but includes also the practices of prenatal sex selection and female infanticide."

Both have been significant in nations such as India and China, where a number of cultural and societal norms have historically favored male children.

"These acts, condemned in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, continue to result in the deaths of millions of 'missing girls' each year," said Gallagher. "Any form of violence against women and girls is unacceptable and must be combatted."

He also underscored persistent "disparities in health care" for women, saying that "although maternal mortality rates have dropped significantly since 1990, progress has stalled in recent years."

Gallagher stressed that "access to prenatal care and skilled birth attendants, as well as to healthcare systems and infrastructure must increase, while false solutions such as abortion rejected."

The Catholic Church teaches that human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the first moment of conception, and since the first century has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion.

"Indeed, protecting the right to life is essential, as it underpins all other fundamental rights," he said, referencing the words of St. John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical Evangelium Vitae.

Gallagher also quoted Pope Leo XIV's May 16 address to diplomats accredited to the Holy See, saying, "Equality for women cannot be achieved unless 'the dignity of every person, especially the most frail and vulnerable, from the unborn to the elderly,' is respected."

The archbishop concluded that the "primary concern" of the Beijing Declaration "still remains neglected," adding, "It is the hope of the Holy See that instead of focusing on divisive issues that do not necessarily beneficial to women, States fulfill their commitments to ensure equality for women, and respect for their God-given dignity."