

Churches should promote value of women to combat India's gender abortion, says charity



Not a single girl has been born in a district of Uttarakhand in northern India since April, while 216 newborn boys have been recorded.

Authorities suspect that sex-selective terminations have been carried out in as many as 132 villages in the region.

Abortion by gender was banned in India 25 years ago, following a growing problem with mistreatment towards girls – with many being abandoned, starved and killed at birth.

Anushree Bernard from the Vanishing Girls campaign by religious freedom charity ADF International – which works to end the practise of aborting girls in the womb – told Premier the number of girls being born in India has been decreasing for many years: “The last census that was conducted in the year 2011 in India, there was a complete drastic decline in the child sex ratio between the age group of zero to six years in India, with only 918 girls for every thousand boys.”

Ms Bernard said that many parents chose to abort girls because of the potential financial pressures they can bring.

Sons are favoured in the culture as traditionally they are expected to provide economic stability for the family, whilst women are given in marriage and a dowry payment is required.

She explained: “When a girl gets married, the girl’s family has to pay a certain amount as gifts to the son in law in return for the marriage. The fathers always have this thought in the back of their head about how they have to pay a dowry.”

Dowries have been abolished in India but many still practice the tradition illegally.

Ms Bernard went on to say that the negative view of women within Indian society makes life very difficult and some parents question the quality of life they could give to a girl: “We have come across women, who say they feel that India is so unsafe and dangerous for young girls and women that it is better to not let them be born.”

When asked how the church can stand up for the rights of the unborn Ms Bernard said: “The Church should be vocal about raising awareness among congregation members and also in the larger community about the importance of girls in the families about having daughters in your family, about respecting women, not only in the family but in schools and churches and workplaces.

“If a girl is born and she’s not accepted by the parents, then providing shelter and safe spaces for those children, providing shelter homes. Church should be the safe space where women and girls can go and find shelter and peace and restoration.”

– Source: premier.org.uk