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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work

Statement submitted by the Latin American Caucus, formed by a group of non-governmental organizations 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.

A new and more inclusive gender approach through the education of youth

"More than ever before, the essential task of education seems to be to make sure that all people enjoy the freedom of thought, judgement, feeling and imagination to develop their talents and keep control of as much of their lives as they can."

Jaques Delors¹

Education, recognized as a human rightⁱⁱ, is essential for the development of human capital, and more specifically, for the future of young generations. Education, the most important tool for the development of any country, therefore it must be universal, equal, and of high standards. It is only through this manner that the quality of life, the access to job opportunities and the social environment may be improved. All of this in order to achieve the eradication of poverty and some of the mayor problems that concern the world today: violence, drug abuse, environmental damage, social and economic inequality, and AIDS, among other diseases.

It is well known that the right to education opens a scenario of opportunities for boys and girls, teenagers and adults, as it submerges them into the comprehension of the world in which they live. It enhances their faculties and improves their social and working incursion. "Education for All" was the motto of the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, April 2000)ⁱⁱⁱ, where it was stressed that right to education is not just the access to it (which at first hand is a great achievement), but an education to life which should also include the teaching of relational skills and abilities that enable young people to assume control of their lives, in the social context and contemporary world.

* E/CN.6/2011/1

On the same note, the *Beijing Platform for Action* adopted by the *Fourth World Conference on Women* acknowledges the need for women to have full access, in equal conditions to men, to education and training as one of the 12 spheres of concern that demand the taking of urgent measures by the governments and the international community.

In its 41st period of sessions celebrated in 1997, the Commission on the Status of Women advised the incorporation of a gender-based perspective in all educational programs and policies of the educational sector.^{iv} From then on significant international efforts were made to push the total inclusion of women into the educational issue. The results have been considerable in most of the countries, especially related to literacy rates which are nowadays significantly balanced between both genders.^v In fact, according to the latest OECD research, in the countries affiliated to it, more women get college degrees than men (46 and 30% respectively).^{vi}

Regarding other subjects, the terminal efficiency in basic education, puts into notice that while the improvement in the coverage has been achieved, the same cannot be said about the quality and permanency. As an example of this, in Mexico more than half of the young people between 15 and 18 years old are out of school. This means that from 98% of boys and girls that finish elementary school and begin middle school, only 62% will see their education finished. As a result of this, there are millions of teenagers outside the school, drastically reducing their opportunities and raising the psychosocial risks that will affect them and their environment.^{vii}

Male and female teenagers leave the classroom to go to work and balance the economy of their homes, throwing aside the opportunity to build a better future that would come about with the finishing of their studies. The ECLAC sustains that at least 11 to 12 years of formal education are required to avoid poverty and all sufferance associated with it.^{viii}

The problem is disturbing to both sexes. For that reason, gender equality must not only be observed from one angle but from two: men and women's. It is important to make emphasis in the need for a promotion of a gender perspective which integrates the problems of women, but also those which affect men in education. Men, all the same as women, suffer from stereotyped models which dictate what it "means to be a man".^{ix} Among other things, those models include: the glorification of violence, criminal behavior, the promotion of sexual risk behavior, drug abuse, and even suicide.

The consequences of this crisis of masculinity are not to be disregarded, as they negatively affect not only men, but women as well. For that reason it is urgent to address them a them promptly. In addition, this crisis has been exacerbated by the recession, unemployment and raise of poverty, which have reduced the quality of life within the family. Man, originally acknowledged as the head of the family, has suffered a blow to his self-esteem, and his authority. As result, he frequently resorts to exert violence towards women and children. In doing so he searches the possibility of showing his control over others, and thus repeating the stereotype of what "being a real man" is understood to be. Being it so, it is absolutely necessary to research and understand the roots of violence against women through male perspective, in order to truly eradicate them.

Regarding other aspects, it is because of the lack of economic and recreational opportunities, that women as well as young men fall back to using sexual intercourse as a way of gaining respect and status in a group.^x The notion of masculinity in many contexts is related with the sexual risk behavior, which generates an increase in the venereal diseases, which affects man as much as it does women.

If gender is relational and women's issues as well as the issues regarding men have a strong impact in social development: why does gender remain being only a synonym of women? The gender equality approach to education must be inclusive, as it is an issue that involves and regards them both.¹⁰ It is true that women, especially in developed countries, continue to be in disadvantage in several areas. Nevertheless, it is also true that interventions pointed towards the improvement of women situations, will hardly be effective, or sustainable, if men are not involved, as coworkers, responsible for their actions.

True development will not be achieved as long as the idea that "*men are women's greatest problem*" persists. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that in many occasions men are the ones who deny evolving in his pre-conception about their masculinity. Being this so, it is in this area where the hardest work with young men should be done,

Along with the promotion among young women and men of equal relationships between both sexes is the importance to promote positive views about men's involvement in the sharing of responsibilities related to house and family work, such as responsible fatherhood and an integral development of the sexual and reproductive health of teenagers and young people. Educational programs which involve young men have proved to be more effective when they allow them to recognize pain, suffering in a peaceful way, without developing violent behaviors towards women or other men.^{xi}

In different social contexts, changes have been made in the way men behave towards women. Nowadays thousands of men agree with the importance of women's preparation and development. The approach to gender which recognizes that both women and men reproduce gender roles makes an emphasis on the importance of getting them both involved in the development of new and healthier relationships. These new kinds of relationships will help to build a more pacific and equal society. Our previous arguments allow us to conclude that it is absolutely necessary that public policies and the allocation of resources be destined to the achievement of gender equality in order to encourage an integrative perspective. Such a perspective should help in comprehending that gender issues between young men and women matter. Those issues will have effects in the way those young people socialize, inside their family and in their social context.

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ⁱ International Commission on Education for the Twenty first Century. *Learning: The Treasure Within. Report to the UNESCO*. Paris,1996.

ⁱⁱ United Nations General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Paris, 1948.

ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF/ UNESCO. *A Human Rights Based Approach to Education*. New York, 2007.

^{iv} Commission on the Status of Women. 41st Session, *Follow up to the World Conference on Women: Review of Mainstreaming in the Organizations of the United Nations System*. "Provisional Agenda Item 3: Progress achieved in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and in mainstreaming a gender" (E/CN.6/1997/2). March 1997

^v Hausmann, Ricardo (2010). *The Global Gender Gap 2010*. World Economic Forum. Geneva, Switzerland.

^{vi} *Highlights from Education at a Glance 2010*. OECD.

^{vii} Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa México, INEE, 2009: indicador AT02b-A

^{viii} Vélaz, Consuelo de Medrano Ureta (2005). *Retos de la Educación Básica en América Latina*, Fundación Carolina.

^{ix} Barker, Gary. (2005). *Dying to be Men: Youth and Masculinity and social exclusion*. Oxford, U.K.: Routledge.

^x Bannon, Ian (2006) *The Other Half of Gender: Men issues in development*. World Bank. Washington D.C.

^{xi} Some example of this programs: AXIOS- Mision Mujer Program (Teenagers in México), "Men Make a Difference" Campaign (UNAIDS), White Ribbon Campaign (Canada), "Health and Gender" (México), "Conscientizing Male Adolescent" (Nigeria), "Stepping Stones" (Africa).