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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the 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**

Statement submitted by the *Coordination française du lobby européen des femmes*, 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.



Statement

The *Coordination française du lobby européen des femmes* [French Coordination for the European Women's Lobby] defends the principle of a responsible and mutually supportive society in which equality between women and men is the key consideration. Consequently, the third Millennium Development Goal, namely "Promote gender equality and empower women", is fundamental.

In the context of implementing this goal, the struggle against gender stereotypes in school and in the working life of women and girls is an essential question.

Gender stereotypes are defined as "any pejorative or partial representation of either sex (in language, attitudes or images) which associates particular roles, modes of behaviour, characteristics, attributes or products to people on the basis of gender, without taking them into consideration as individuals."

They impose the primacy of the masculine over the feminine and they shunt women into so-called "maternal" social roles. The school and the family, as the principal institutions for socializing individuals, are two essential vectors in reproducing gender stereotypes in the academic and vocational orientation of girls and boys.

These two institutions are at the source of the dichotomy that exists between the careers pursued by men and by women, women's studies and men's studies. Moreover, this distinction perpetuates male hegemony, as men are more geared to the pursuit of occupational excellence than are women.

The social roles assigned to each sex deprive many girls and women of access to education. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, girls without schooling outnumber boys without schooling by around 10 million. These millions of unschooled children are thus deprived of their potential, and girls are particularly affected because of the gender stereotypes that persist.

This situation is all the more acceptable because in countries where girls have access to schooling they are more successful than boys at all levels of study, from primary to higher education. This success offers glaring proof of the artificial rather than innate character of stereotypes that would have women and girls "stay at home" instead of going to school or to work.

The situation of girls in countries where they have access to school is far from perfect, then, and much remains to be done. Once again, they are the victims of gender violence which affects all walks of life in our society. Girls are steered towards so-called "feminine" studies and trades, which are always considered inferior.

The areas of education relating to health and personal care giving are almost exclusively reserved to girls, for these studies are considered to reflect their "maternal instincts".

Careers in personal care services are held in low esteem and are particularly insecure: minimum wages, forced part-time work, and lack of recognition constitute the three main characteristics of these trades, indispensable though they are.

Gender stereotypes in educational and vocational guidance constitute terrible violence for women who are not allowed to grow and flourish as individuals. Shutting women away in a social role as "mother", whether or not they have children, amounts

to depriving women of the ability to exercise their own judgment and to make their own free choices.

Our organization maintains that women's empowerment necessarily entails compulsory schooling for girls, which constitutes the second of the Millennium Development Goals. As we see it, this goal is indispensable but insufficient for putting an end to this violence against women, something that deserves a more sustained commitment.

It is essential to train educational personnel to the problem of gender stereotypes in order to avoid their reproduction.

It is essential to change the gender-based images of trades and careers and of the family roles of women and men.

To conclude, it is essential to sensitize public opinion and to speak out against the resort to sexist stereotypes.
