Dear Delegates,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2015 Montessori Model United Nations Conference.

The following pages intend to guide you in the research of the topics that will be debated at MMUN 2015 in committee sessions. Please note this guide only provides the basis for your investigation. It is your responsibility to find as much information necessary on the topics and how they relate to the country you represent. Such information should help you write your Position Paper, where you need to cite the references in the text and finally list all references in the Modern Language Association (MLA) format.

The more information and understanding you acquire on the two topics, the more you will be able to influence the Resolution writing process through debates [formal and informal caucuses], and the MMUN experience as a whole. Please feel free to contact us if and when you face challenges in your research or formatting your Position Papers.
We encourage you to learn all you can about your topics first and then study your country with regard to the two selected topics. Please remember that both committee members need to be well versed and ready to debate both topics.

Enjoy researching and writing your Position Papers.

We look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

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UN Women

In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. In doing so, UN Member States took an historic step in accelerating the Organization’s goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women’s empowerment:

- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

The main roles of UN Women are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Empowerment of Women through Education

Topic Background

The UN Charter states that women should be “equal actors, partners and beneficiaries of sustainable development, human rights, peace, and security.” Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that “everyone has the right to education” and that it “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality.” The Declaration also articulates the right to work and “free choice of employment” for everyone. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight critical international development goals, also “promote gender equality and empower women” and strive to “achieve universal primary education.” These proclamations provide the world with an unprecedented opportunity to improve the lives of millions of women globally.

However, real equality for women still does not exist in most of the world. For ages, different societies at different times have discriminated against women for various reasons. Women have been wrongfully considered as weak, with lower capacities of intelligence, stereotyped on the basis of gender, subjected to unequal treatment, and relegated to subservient and passive roles in society. These traditional misconceptions cause discrimination against women in the educational and labor market and oftentimes restrict them from finding jobs that can help their family climb out of poverty.

One belief is that women are simply not intelligent or ambitious enough to take jobs traditionally occupied by men. After all, some argue, women don’t often rise to positions of power in politics, business or the sciences, even when they have the same access to education as men, as frequently occurs in many developed regions. A panel convened by the United States National Academy of Sciences determined that any intellectual differences between women and men were insignificant. The real reason few women are able to rise to levels of power, the panel discovered, is because employers wrongly view women as less capable, less competitive or more distracted by family life than men.

Another barrier to gender equality is the belief that women’s role in society must be limited to caring for children and the elderly. Where there is limited money to pay school fees, families often choose to educate sons instead of daughters. As a result from this inequality, sons are expected to find employment, and daughters are expected to care for their families, creating a system in which women are financially dependent on men.

Domestic responsibilities do play a large role in preventing women’s achievement in the workplace. As women around the world struggle to enter the labor market, they often discover that their husbands do not assist them with household chores. This phenomenon, called double burden, overworks women and prevents them from rising to prominent positions outside the home. In a 2005 UN report, experts determined that “men’s greater participation in household and family care [is] essential [to creating gender equality].”

The single most important factor preventing girls from attending and achieving in school, as well as obtaining access to jobs and education, is gender discrimination. Girls and boys both have hurdles to overcome in terms of access to primary education and jobs; however, for girls these obstacles are, in many cases, more frequent and
difficult. Early marriages and pregnancies are widespread and common in many countries, and some even have laws prohibiting pregnant girls from attending or returning to school after birth.

Issues of safety and security are also heightened with regards to women and girls. Physical violence in school, including harassment, sexual abuse and rape, is directed towards girls much more than boys since girls are seen as weaker and less likely to take a strong stand against harassment. Additionally, the lack of female teachers as role models or confidants can also play a role in making girls feel less secure in the school environment while studying curricula that perpetuates gender discrimination and stereotyped roles.

All these inequalities have placed women at a disadvantage in participating and adequately contributing to our societies. Today, access to education, training and employment for women and girls remains woefully inadequate. Women and girls, citizens of the world and pillars of our society that equal half of humanity, must get proper access to education, training, and employment in order for society to advance forward.

Past International Action

International action on the equality of women began with the 1979 adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which defines men and women as equals and declares that nations must take whatever effort possible to eliminate discrimination against women for any reason. 184 UN member states have ratified CEDAW since 1979. Parties to the treaty are required to submit national reports every four years, detailing their compliance with the convention.

The CEDAW calls for member states to “incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women, establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.”

In 1995 in Beijing, the UN held its fourth annual World Conference on Women, where delegates created the “Platform for Action,” a document promoting women’s equality around the world. The Platform defined the “12 Areas of Concern,” areas that most need reform in order to promote women’s rights and equality: poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, decision making, laws and regulations, human rights, media, environment, girls’ health and safety, and the economy. At the end of the Conference, 189 member states voted to adopt the Platform for Action. However, at follow-up conferences, Beijing+5 in 2000 and Beijing+10 in 2005, analyses show that not enough progress had been made to reform the 12 Areas of Concern and promote women’s equality.

The Fourth World Conference on Women focused on ensuring equal access to education, the eradication of illiteracy among women, the improvement of women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education, the development of education and training free of discrimination, sufficient resources for education and their supervision, educational reforms, and finally, the promotion of lifelong education and
training for girls and women. The conference called for countries to ensure equal access to education by eliminating discrimination in enrollment and all levels of education, regardless of gender, language, nationality, age, etc. It also called on the appropriate distribution of resources dedicated to education, improvement of its quality and the encouragement of counseling and school and career-oriented programs to invite girls and women to pursue an education. Follow-up conferences have continued to promote these same goals, seeing how their completion is a long way ahead.

The United Nations has made gender equality and the empowerment of women a top priority with the establishment of the UN Women agency, which took over the responsibilities of the former UNIFEM agency, in 2010. But it remains to be seen if their efforts will be effective in empowering girls through education.

**Possible Solutions**

Possible solutions should address four key areas: access for girls to education, security and safety needed to keep girls in school, empowerment through employment opportunities after school, and eliminating societal forms of discrimination against girls who seek education.

In terms of access, solutions need to address any laws or discrimination that prevent girls from attending schools and the financial costs of sending girls to schools (especially when a family has to choose between sending a boy or a girl). In addition, it should address how early pregnancies and marriages affect girls’ access to education.

Retention efforts are also needed, especially in terms of security and safety of the schools. Schools need to have policies that create environments free from the threat of physical violence, harassment, sexual abuse and rape. Also, many schools in developing countries need proper sanitation facilities or products for teenage girls, otherwise they may return home and drop out from school.

Once girls are in school, they also needed to feel empowered. They need to see role models, whether that means female teachers, women in the workplace, or women in other leadership positions. Girls also need to feel that their education will help them find employment in the future and that education is the first step to moving out of poverty.

Finally, the international community needs to address how to eliminate discrimination against women. This discrimination takes place not only at schools but also at work and in daily life. How can we create an environment where women are truly viewed as equals in society?

**Further Research**

**Guiding Questions**

1. How many are girls attending schools and entering the work force in your country?
2. What is the perceived role of women in your country? How does this affect their decisions to attend school and find work?
3. Has your country ratified the CEDAW? Do laws prohibit gender discrimination in your country?
4. How can girls have more accessible, safer, and longer-lasting opportunities to attend school?

**Research Sources**

- UN WOMEN: [http://www.unwomen.org/](http://www.unwomen.org/)

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