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Statement submitted by International Relations Students’ Association of McGill University, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The International Relations Students' Association of McGill University is a student-run non-governmental organisation that aims to align its initiatives with international development goals, such as those outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We operate under McGill University, located in Montréal, Canada, and run various youth engagement programs. One such program is that of the "Junior Peacemakers", where we coordinate with local elementary schools and send trained volunteers to educate children on global issues. The International Relations Students' Association of McGill University aims to review our successes, challenges, and plans to overcome these various obstacles.

The main goal of the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University is to promote youth engagement and global citizenship. Our various portfolios provide a range of opportunities that make this possible. Our publications include Flux, our undergraduate academic journal, and the McGill International Review, our regularly updated online news platform. We also train teams of highly skilled delegates to elite international Model United Nations Conferences, such as the Harvard National Model United Nations conference and the University of Pennsylvania Model United Nations Conference. Within these conferences, our delegates deliberate and construct solutions to global issues, where our McGill students frequently champion several "Best Delegate" and "Honourable Mention" awards.

In turn, we host two prestigious Model United Nations conferences. Every November, we host the Secondary Schools' United Nations Symposium, created for high school students and facilitated by McGill University students. Every January, we host the McGill Model United Nations Assembly for collegiate level students, which has been deemed the number one Model United Nations Conference in Canada and the number two Model United Nations Conference in North America.

All of these portfolios follow our mandate of providing various platforms for young people to critically explore global affairs. Most notably however, one of our most prestigious, engaging, and long running programs is "Junior Peacemakers". The mandate of the Junior Peacemakers is to foster global awareness and child activism. Trained volunteers travel to schools across Montréal, educating children in the fifth and sixth grade about various issues surrounding the Sustainable Development Goals. During the six-week program, our volunteers deliver workshops in either English or French on topics such as poverty, human rights, inequality, and conflict resolution, with the hopes of sparking a sense of unity and solidarity in students.

The training received by these volunteers is regulated by our organisation, where we require educators to undergo various equity and teaching training sessions to better communicate these complex issues to children. The Junior Peacemakers executive team is comprised of highly capable and passionate university students, engaged with a range of disciplines such as Political Science, Social Entrepreneurship, and Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies, and are therefore equipped with substantive knowledge on these various issues.

Because the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University prides itself on being an inclusive organisation, we work to ensure that our Junior Peacemakers program is free. All necessary materials are provided, and there is no cost to participate. We understand that financial barriers may prevent students from pursuing educational opportunities and strive to make all of our portfolios, particularly the Junior Peacemakers program, as accessible as possible by facilitating bilingual communication in both French and English, and reaching out to youth

audiences, including elementary, high school, and collegiate level students across all socio-economic backgrounds.

Bearing these initiatives in mind, but most importantly our Junior Peacemakers Program, the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University has worked to place a greater focus on women's empowerment, particularly in alignment with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We acknowledge the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration of international non-governmental organisations, such as ours, in integrating Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality, into all aspects of development including sustainability, economic growth, and most pertinently, education. Although all of the twelve identified critical areas of concern on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action agenda are integral to holistic empowerment, our program focuses on five particular subjects: the girl child, education and training of women, human rights of women, an institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, women in power and decision-making. These areas are the most pertinent to our program, as they are the most relevant to our younger audiences.

We aim to empower young female children, by giving recognition to the efforts of trailblazing youth who are fighting for justice and equity, such as Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, and Autumn Peltier. This leads well into our second focus and area of concern, being the education and training of women, as education is integral in empowerment of young girls in society. We frame education as a human right, leading into the third area of concern, and discuss global inequalities that have historically created barriers to education. We also discuss institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, including the creation of strong and accessible programs, such as the Junior Peacemakers. We conclude this workshop with a reflection activity of our last area of concern – women in power and decision making. We implore children to brainstorm possibilities and dreams of a better future, with a particular focus on women, as we have now unpacked various barriers that women may face as they relate to elementary school students.

Although we have made several improvements of within our Junior Peacemakers program to include programming focused on gender equality, our organisation still faces various challenges in promoting a holistic educational experience. For one, we are looking to integrate other aspects of the twelve areas of concern, as outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Although the five areas of concern we currently discuss are the most applicable to our young audiences, we aim to give recognition to various intersectional experiences.

It is of the utmost importance to emphasize the need for marginalised women to be drivers of their own development, and how empowerment can come in various forms based on the unique obstacles each woman may face. In line with this, we must also redefine empowerment within a global context by moving away from western conventions and measurements of equality, and shifting towards a greater focus on freedom of choice and accessibility to opportunities. Engaging younger children in global discourse and awareness surrounding the multiplicity of challenges that different women around the world face is increasingly important, and our organisation strives to incorporate these ideals into our institution and programming.

With these ideas for future improvements in mind, we are currently putting various plans into motion to create a more intersectional and inclusive learning environment. To overcome the challenge of under recognising the myriad of intersectional experiences, we hope to integrate educational programming surrounding other critical areas of concern, such as women and the environment, women and poverty, women and health, and women in armed conflict. Furthermore, although it is important to host workshops specifically focused on gender equality,

we are looking towards perhaps integrating these issues as central point of discussion throughout all topics of our curriculum.

Additionally, to encourage action towards the global goals outside of the classroom, we aim to develop a new portion of our curriculum focused on allyship, to teach and reflect on practical skills such as empathy and solidarity. This will help engage male-identifying students and create a greater understanding of other related Sustainable Development Goals, such as the tenth goal regarding reduced inequalities. In order to effectively develop this new addition to our program, we hope to collaborate with university partners and groups throughout Montréal who represent marginalised communities and are better informed about various intersectional experiences. The future of the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University, and its Junior Peacemakers Program, aims to recognise the diversity of challenges that different women face, and reformat our curriculum to provide a more intersectional educational experience.
