



## NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

# Preventing Sexual Exploitation: A More Ambitious, But Achievable Project

Montréal. Wednesday, February 17, 2016 – In light of recent events, and following the unveiling by Minister Coiteux of “Programme Jeunesse,” a program to fight the recruitment and sexual exploitation of girls in prostitution, the Concertation des luttes contre l’exploitation sexuelle (CLES), Maison d’Haïti, Maison Kekpart, and YWCA of Montreal acknowledge the government’s initiative, but find it insufficient.

These four organizations work for projects to prevent the sexual exploitation of girls, are concerned about the trivialization of sexual exploitation, including pornography and prostitution in all of its forms. The government’s new program lacks vision or any reference to the principle of women’s equality, which should be at the centre of all intervention programs.

For these reasons, the four organizations insist on the importance of prevention and public awareness in the campaign against sexual exploitation and violence against women. These groups’ programs are given in a variety of settings, in collaboration with other agencies, and are designed to engage youth in an in-depth process. The organizations conduct prevention activities based on an equality framework for youth and adults. They play an important role and should be consulted by all concerned stakeholders and included in the development of governmental programs and action plans.

“We believe that by combining prevention/awareness-raising, education, and screening, we will be able to help girls make better choices for themselves and lower the risks of sexual exploitation. We developed the *Sans P ni E* project specifically for teenage girls. They learn about healthy and egalitarian relationships, and are encouraged to develop their personal potential, autonomy, and self-esteem,” said Richard Desjardins, Executive Director of Maison Kekpart.

“Prevention is a necessity. That is what makes it possible for us to intervene early with the young and create a trusting atmosphere so that we can take action at the crucial moment. Prevention means risk reduction, guiding vulnerable youth, helping young people deal with their questions. It is all about empowering them to act and think in a critical way. Prevention is about education. It is a necessity that should be a priority,” said Émilie Martinak, project coordinator for the Maison d’Haïti.

“Girls and boys begin at an early age to develop their views about healthy and egalitarian relationships and self-esteem. It is crucial that the young be made aware of these things during childhood and adolescence. While security is important, we must also protect youth through prevention and education. We must also work with boys and men to raise their awareness, and eradicate all forms of violence against girls and women, including sexual exploitation. At the YWCA of Montreal, we have different programs that address these issues in an in-depth and proactive way. Like other groups, we need funds to maximize our services,” stated Lilia Goldfarb, Director of Youth Services for the YWCA of Montreal.

“What we need right now is the adoption of the governmental action plan on sexual exploitation, including support for women to leave prostitution. The plan was announced in 2011 and we have been waiting since then. It was part of the second governmental action plan on gender equality (2011-2015). An interdepartmental committee held consultations in the fall of 2013 and tabled a report, but we have yet to see a formal action plan. We’re worried that the recent events at the Youth Centre in Laval will spur the government into a hasty response and put the emphasis—and the investment—solely on youth centres. That would be a mistake,” said Diane Matte, community organizer and founder of the CLES.

“The Canadian Women’s Foundation is determined to put an end to violence against women and the sexual exploitation of girls in Canada. The Foundation believes that by investing in shelters and programs that help women and girls who are victims of violence rebuild their lives, we can help to end violence once and for all. We also believe that investing in violence prevention programs that teach teenagers (boys and girls) about healthy relationships is essential if we want to prevent violence,” said Anuradha Dugal, Violence Prevention Program Director.

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