Declaration of the 2017 OMEP Latin America Assembly

URGENT APPEAL TO CONSIDER CARE AND EDUCATION AS INSEPARABLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PUBLIC POLICIES

We, presidents, delegates, and members of the Committees from the Latin American Region of OMEP¹, meeting in Assembly in Montevideo City, agree in the urgent need that States and society as whole assume that ensuring Latin American boys and girls their right to care and integral education during early childhood is a highest priority.²

Latin America shows important geographic, ethnic, social, cultural and economic diversity and inequality. The actions carried out in our countries in relation to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)³ account for such heterogeneity and constitute key factors to achieve equality. We acknowledge we have made great progresses in our countries; as in recognizing boys and girls as social subjects and citizens bearers of rights from birth, in the allocation of resources and in the approval of ECCE laws and public policies. Nonetheless, the gap between the stated purposes and the situation in which a great number of boys and girls live and develop during their first years of life is still wide. Many human right protection policies aimed at early childhood continue to be partial and disjointed, failing to ensure the integrity demanded by the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) or by the local regulations generated in each country as result of their adhesion. Thus, a great majority of boys and girls still suffers from social and economic vulnerability. We are concerned that a highly significant number of these boys and girls do not have access to quality ECCE institutions and that their families are not included in social and education policies and programs.

Likewise, we have confirmed that in the last years, public policies focused on the period of life between birth and the age of three only promote “care” and “stimulation” without properly considering an education of quality that favors the integral development and the engagement in the culture. While such policies are mainly implemented through partial “services”, characterized by low investment and poor quality, the progress achieved in free and universal education for 3, 4, and 5 year-old children requires the application of more integral and articulated approaches that meet quality criteria. The Latin American experience shows that those policies reinforce inequality by offering precarious services to the boys and girls from the most vulnerable sectors. This way, we will continue building and unjust society and fail to provide a fulfilling future for everyone in our Latin America.

In view of the above, we declare the following:

- each boy and girl is born a citizen and thus is entitled to all human rights, which are universal, interdependent and indivisible.

- education is a fundamental human right for all citizens, both a human right, and an indispensable means of realizing all other rights.

¹ The World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) is the largest and oldest organization concerned with the general wellbeing, optimum development and education for children from birth and until the age of 8. It is a NGO with Consultative Status at the UN and UNESCO since its foundation in 1948.

² COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (2005) GENERAL COMMENT Nº 7 Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood. “...early childhood, the period below the age of 8 years; States parties should review their obligations towards young children in the context of this definition.”

³ Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) fosters holistic development and learning of young children from birth to eight years of age. UNESCO http://www.unesco.org/new/es/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/advocacy/global-action-week/gaw-2012/what-is-ecce/
policies designed for Early Childhood that intend to offer care without educating are misleading since taking care and educating are part of the same process, especially at this stage of life.

This is why we call on Latin American governments, their public servants, lawmakers, and other political and social actors that participate in the definition and/or executions of ECCE public policies:

1) to reformulate the conceptions, assumptions and strategies on which such policies are based, acknowledging the following:
   - **education** must occupy a key place in the integral formation of people since the moment a person is born;
   - **care** must be part of the ethics inherent to the state policies aimed at all human beings, in all the fields of action;
   - taking care and educating constitute inseparable and unavoidable social practices during early childhood to ensure the effective implementation of human rights and full development of the people;
   - **professional knowledge** and training are essential to carry out an ECCE of quality within this stage, key for the integral development of the citizen.

2) to recognize the progress and investment already made in Latin America:
   - in building, implementing and developing an important network of ECCE centers.
   - in implementing and consolidating specific teacher training plans and programs, a sign of progressivism and quality in Latin American early education from its beginnings, more than a century ago, and to the present.
   - in the design and execution of ECCE public policies that find support in the successful experiences carried out by the education, health and social development sectors.

3) to redefine public policies for early childhood on the basis of respect for the best interest of the child by
   - paying special attention to the balance among the responses implemented in relation to the rights and needs of the boys and girls and of the adults in charge of them.
   - generating an adequate synergy among the different programs and services, avoiding divisions that could be in detriment of the integrity of the interventions and generate loss of resources.
   - investing the required financial resources that are needed to make early childhood rights and best interests effective.4

The progress achieved in integral education and care in early childhood through history is the result of a long-term struggle led by women, human rights advocates, educators and civilians. The members of OMEP Latin America put at disposal of the community, specially of authorities and social and political leaders, our unwavering commitment, energy, knowledge and expertise in taking actions that ensure equality, justice, wellbeing and education to all Latin American kids, their families, communities and the society in general.

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4 General comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children’s rights (art. 4) “States parties should be able to demonstrate how the best interests of the child have been considered in budgetary decision-making, including how they have been weighed against other considerations”.