The Right Honourable David Cameron MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

9 June 2011

Dear Prime Minister,

Regarding 'Letting Children be Children': Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood by Reg Bailey

As expert organisations working to promote gender equality and eliminate violence against women and girls, we warmly welcome your personal commitment to addressing the sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood.

We too are deeply concerned about the ubiquitous wallpaper of sexualised imagery which reinforce negative gender stereotypes and create conducive contexts for violence against women and girls. By reinforcing stereotypes of women and girls as sexual objects and sexually available for men and boys and the stereotype of male sexual 'need' and 'entitlement', the culture of sexualisation creates a context in which violence against women and girls is justified and normalised. As such, we welcome the recommendations of Reg Bailey's 'Letting Children be Children' report. We are in agreement that greater action by business, regulators and broadcasters is long overdue and we particularly welcome your commitment to holding business and retailers to account starting with your proposed meeting in October 2011. However, based on experience to-date we are concerned that voluntary regulation will not deliver the results we all want to see. We recommend that the Government introduces legislation to improve the regulation of business, regulators and broadcasters as an urgent priority.

Whilst we are supportive of the proposed measures, we are concerned that the report is focussed primarily on the perspective of parents, rather than the rights of children or a gender equality perspective. While parental concern about sexualisation is important, the Government's response must ensure that young people are empowered with the skills and information they need to counteract the negative effects of sexualisation. Schools have a vital role to play through the universal provision of mandatory sex and relationships education which addresses sexual consent, gender stereotypes, healthy relationships and media literacy. Pornography is increasingly accessed by boys at a younger age and research suggests that this

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influences young men's expectations of sexual relationships.[1] Our 2010 YouGov poll found that over a quarter (28%) of young people reported they had seen sexual pictures on mobile phones at school a few times a month or more and that one in three girls experience unwanted sexual touching in UK schools. This signals the need for urgent action in schools to tackle the widespread attitudes that condone violence against women and girls, particularly amongst young men and boys.

In this context we are also concerned that the report does not take account of other ways in which the girls and young women are restricted, often by parents due to religious reasons or concerns about 'modesty'. This may include withdrawing young girls from sex education and other important educational activities including PE classes and residential school trips. Young black, minority and ethnic women may be disproportionately affected by such restrictions. The denial of vital education and learning opportunities, including the right to knowledge on how to stay safe in relationships due to the restrictive actions of parents is a critical aspect of sexualisation that must be addressed. The failure of the Review to address the important role of education is particularly worrying given the wealth of evidence demonstrating the negative impact of sexualisation on the aspirations, opportunities, self-esteem and health of all young women and girls through emphasis on the physical appearance of women and girls.[2]

We are also disappointed about the absence of a gendered perspective in the Bailey report which makes the recommendations less effective. It is critical that the Government's response recognises the gendered nature and consequences of sexualisation and explicitly addresses the links with violence against women and girls and inequality. Furthermore, while it is important to recognise the particularly harmful impact of sexualisation on children, this can not be separated from sources of sexualisation that are targeted at both adults and children, and reinforce negative gender stereotypes and women's inequality. The Government should develop public awareness campaigns promoting respect for women and girls and the response to the Bailey Review should be linked to the Government's strategy on ending violence against women and girls. We also call on the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to establish a formal advisory group of key experts from the media, service providers and academia to monitor the representation of women and girls in the media and make policy recommendations.

We are available to meet with you or your advisors at your convenience to discuss the Government's response to the Bailey report and we look forward to hearing from you soon. Please note that this is an 'open letter' which we are making available to

[1] Papadopoulos, L. Sexualisation of Young People Review, Home Office (2010).
[2] American Psychological Association, Report of the APA Taskforce on the Sexualisation of Girls (2007).

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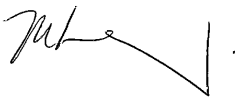
members of the press. We may also make any response from you available to them too.

Yours sincerely,



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