

Mr Chair,

I have the honour of addressing, on behalf of the European Union, this Commission on the Status of Women, as we celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the tenth anniversary of the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the 2000 General Assembly.

The following countries align themselves with this statement: the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

I would like to thank the CSW for supporting these important events. By sharing our experiences and good practices, we hope to overcome the remaining obstacles in our struggle to attain real and effective equality between women and men.

We the Member States and the institutions of the European Union reassert our commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action as well as to the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly as indispensable tools for achieving gender equality as well as for reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

The Platform for Action identified twelve critical areas of concern where specific measures are needed to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women: measures which should aim to guarantee women's full enjoyment of human rights.

The identification of the critical areas of concern was very important, and we are convinced that the commitment made by Governments to effectively incorporate a gender equality perspective in all their institutions, in all policies, at all levels and at all stages of policy and decision-making, was a mile stone and a valuable strategy for achieving gender equality. To carry out this process of gender mainstreaming, an analysis must be made of the effects that different policies have on men and women.

Mr. Chair,

The European Union, which I have the honour of representing at this Session, recently entered a new phase, with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Even though the European Union had, since 1997, included among its goals the elimination of inequalities between men and women, the new Treaty boosts this aim by finally making the European Charter of Fundamental Rights legally binding. The Charter reiterates the European Union's long-standing guarantee of equality between women and men in all domains.

This is a time for review and assessment. It is 15 years since the adoption of the Platform for Action, 10 years since the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly, 10 years since the Millennium Summit and 10 years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325.

In the European Union, the 2006-2010 strategy of the European Commission for equality between women and men – the so-called Roadmap – will lapse this year, as

will the EU Strategy for growth and employment. We are therefore currently in the process of reviewing and assessing in order to define the shape of our future equality policies, recognising the fact that we are still facing many challenges.

Mr. Chair,

Fifteen years ago in Beijing, we identified twelve critical areas of concern. It is now time for policies and action and let us use this celebratory meeting to resolve those concerns for good.

We are currently going through a deep economic crisis. In the European Union, the recession is worse than the Great Depression of the 1930s. The economic crisis is having a different impact on women and men due to the different roles still assigned to them in society and in the labour market and may produce negative effects on the progress achieved so far in the field of equality between women and men.

The crisis has brought particular hardship to those who have lost their jobs and those who are currently having difficulty joining or re-entering the labour market. Governments have the obligation to mitigate the adverse effects of the crisis. Gender responsive analysis and budgeting is one way to ensure adequate levels and quality of funding for gender equality and empowerment of women together with ensuring that a gender perspective is adopted in the analysis of the solution to the crisis in order to withstand its effects.

The EU is aware of the crucial role which the social partners, civil society, and the private sector can play in resolving this crisis, and the EU therefore actively cooperates with these agents. We especially welcome the contributions which women's associations are making and encourage all decision-makers and institutions to fully integrate women in their decision making processes concerning the crisis, given the unique contribution they can make and the way this can improve global governance.

We also acknowledge the important contribution that national and international non-governmental organisations and women's groups make in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. In particular the vital role they play in holding governments accountable for the implementation of the actions agreed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Chair,

Since 1999, the Council of the EU has periodically reviewed the implementation, by the Member States and the EU Institutions, of measures in the areas of critical concern identified by the Beijing Platform for action. For this purpose, indicators have been adopted for measuring and assessing the results of our equality policies. In each of the area covered, EU Member States have taken some political commitments in order to ensure progress through concrete actions. To mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Swedish Presidency of the EU produced a report last

year on the progress made since Beijing+10. The report also identified the remaining obstacles and challenges.

In November 2009, the Council of the EU endorsed the report and reaffirmed the EU Member States strong support to and commitment to fully implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In these conclusions, the Council invited the Member States to produce indicators in two remaining areas of critical concern, namely, "Women and the Environment" and "Women and the Media".

The analysis conducted by the Swedish Presidency has provided us with an assessment of where we are in the European Union with respect to the twelve Beijing critical areas.

In the domain of the fight against poverty, one of the main goals is to achieve gender equality and to reduce the number of women experiencing poverty. This is a relevant challenge for all of us, and in particular in developing countries. The EU is therefore currently preparing a 'Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development', the aim of which is to achieve the best possible results regarding gender in the Millennium Development Goals and poverty reduction, as well as in the fight against gender-based violence.

Turning to the subject of education and women's representation, even though EU women have already attained high levels of education, women are still under-represented in decision-making positions in politics and in the labour market. Gender differences persist not only in terms of school and professional choices but also in qualitative aspects of the education and training experience. Member States will continue to challenge gender stereotypes through awareness-raising and the promotion of a gender sensitive education aimed at both teachers and students, at all educational levels.

The promotion of gender equality and the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls are goals in their own right and also instrumental for achieving internationally agreed development goals. The European Union Affirms our strong support for and commitment to the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action as well as the key actions for further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action agreed at ICPD+5, and the Copenhagen Declaration and Action Programme; and also emphasizes that gender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and reaffirm that expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and health services are essential for achieving the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Programme for Action, and the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Chair,

We have made great efforts, in our domestic as well as our foreign policies, to combat violence against women. The EU firmly supports the UN Secretary General's 'End Violence against Women' campaign. In December 2008 the EU Council of Ministers adopted 'EU guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them', marking the EU's clear political will to treat the subject of women's rights as a priority and to take long-term action in that field.

When talking about violence, we cannot but mention the exploitation suffered by thousands of women and girls who are the victims of human trafficking. The EU Member States are joining forces to fight against the factors that perpetuate this terrible phenomenon, which still afflicts our countries.

We also must not forget the key role women should be able to play as active agents in conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peace building, humanitarian responses, and post-conflict reconstruction. Further efforts are urgently needed to make this happen. Women's and girls' needs also continue to be neglected during post-conflict reconstruction. The EU is firmly committed to the implementation of Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 of the United Nations Security Council, as manifested in the 2008 'Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace, and security'. To date, 9 of the 27 EU Member States have adopted National Action Plans for implementing Resolution 1325. We would like to congratulate Margot Wallström for her appointment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and express our support.

Every year, the European Commission carries out an analysis of equality between women and men in the world of work, for it is women's participation in the labour market that enables them to achieve economic independence and to avoid the poverty trap. The European Union has come close to its goal of attaining 60% of female employment, although differences remain between the EU Member States, with the female employment rate ranging from 36.9% to 73.2%. Women remain also largely underrepresented among decision makers in the economy. For instance they represent on average only 11% of the members of the boards of the top quoted companies in the EU and 3% of the Directors of these boards.

Part-time work is still for the most part female, due to the unequal distribution of family and care obligations: in the EU, more than 6 million women between 25 and 49 are unable to work or can only work part-time due to family responsibilities. This is sure to damage their subsequent careers, but it may also affect their wages, their future pensions, increase their risk of poverty and hinder the achievement of their economic independence.

In some areas an increase of women's participation in decision-making processes can be noticed. In this sense, we are particularly pleased that a woman, Catherine Ashton, was recently appointed EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

However, in order to strengthen our democracies, the EU Member States will continue to work towards the elimination of all obstacles that prevent women's participation on an equal footing with men throughout the life-cycle in all walks of life, especially in the political, economic, and social domains. One important point linked to equal participation is the reconciliation of work and family life and the equal sharing of family responsibilities.

Mr. Chair,

The European Union places great importance on institutional mechanisms for equality, as is shown by the launch of the European Institute for Gender Equality, whose main

aim is to assist the Commission and Member States in the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in all Community policies and the resulting national policies, and the fight against discrimination based on sex.

A few months ago, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, a key document that is no less than a Bill of Rights of Women, and which is currently binding for 186 States. This anniversary has given us the chance to reassert our commitment to the full, effective implementation of the CEDAW Convention, as well as its Optional Protocol.

However, serious violations of human rights still persist which constitute an obstacle to their full enjoyment by women and girls, such as female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices such as early and/or forced marriage, and so-called 'honour crimes'.

The media and the private sector advertising can play a crucial role by refraining from spreading stereotyped images of women and men and by taking a critical view of outdated power structures and gender roles.

Making the media and the advertising industry fully committed to the achievement of gender equality is another challenge we face.

Likewise, women and men must take part on an equal footing in the management and preservation of the environment, in the use of natural resources and in climate and sustainable development policies. Decisions in this field must include women and be made in the light of a rigorous analysis of the different effects which they will have on women and men.

In May 2008, the Council of the European Union urged all the Member States and the European Commission to integrate the gender perspective into all childhood and youth policies and measures, including those related to the fight against poverty and violence, and to pay special attention to children belonging to vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, immigrant children, or children belonging to ethnic minorities.

Gender equality policies must reflect the needs of women who belong to minorities, and the problem of multiple discrimination, such as women with disabilities, requires in-depth consideration. Also, gender equality and the empowerment of women have to be taken into account when developing and implementing integration policies.

Mr. Chair,

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is a central aim of the United Nations. Within the broader context of global system coherence, during 2009, much progress has been made towards the reform of the UN gender architecture, a process in which the EU is playing a very active role. For this reason, we are very glad to have the firm and unanimous support of the General Assembly for the creation of a Composite Gender Entity, as reflected in Resolution 63/311, and we are grateful for the report presented by the General Secretary last December. The EU's main priority is to bring this process to a successful conclusion in the first semester of 2010. We very

much look forward to working together with the other UN Members, with a view to achieving this goal.

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to present the commitment of the EU on Gender Equality. The EU remains dedicated to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and acknowledges that it is as relevant today as it was 15 years ago.

Thank you.