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**Statement by**

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**at**

**the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of  
Women**

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Madam President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Latvia highly appreciates the work done by the Commission, as well as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in the promotion and protection of women's rights globally.

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights, which occurs in all countries, irrespective of income, class or culture. Statistical data confirm that women are the most common victims of domestic violence. The promotion of public awareness on this issue is often constrained by stereotypes about gender roles in family and society and it requires a long period of time and constructive approach to change them. Therefore a holistic approach, which recognizes all kinds of violence – physical, sexual and emotional -, addresses the root causes of violence and develops a coordinated multisectoral response, is essential for achieving a progress. At the same time, it is also necessary to develop strategies for targeted groups to address individual risk factors - children affected by or experiencing violence are one of the main groups in this regard.

Madam President,

Latvia has a long-standing commitment towards gender equality. Norms establishing equal access to employment, guaranteeing maternity and paternity leave and benefits, as well as providing for protection against violence, especially domestic violence, harassment and sexual harassment, are part of the Latvian legal system. Law provides for administrative and criminal responsibility in cases of violence against women. Aggravated responsibility is applied if the crime has been committed within family, against children or abusing person's employment, material or other dependence. Victims of violence and harassment in civil proceedings can apply to the court for protection orders.

In 2008 the Government adopted a special Programme for Reducing Domestic Violence for 2008-2011 which included three priority directions: identification of domestic violence, domestic violence prevention and institutional cooperation in the provision of assistance and

rehabilitation services. The special programme significantly improved data collection, based on dedicated surveys, and inter-institutional cooperation. As a result, for example, it is stipulated by law that health and law enforcement institutions shall work in a coordinated manner in order to identify and address the cases of violence. After the conclusion of the programme, further tasks have been included in the Guidelines for State's Family Policy for 2011-2017 and their Action Plan.

Women who have experienced violence can seek help in 36 crisis centers across Latvia. In the regions, municipalities and NGOs ensure operation of crisis centers that provide professional assistance and information to victims of violence. Social rehabilitation of children who have suffered from violence is financed from the State budget. There is also a special Information Support System created between social, educational and law enforcement institutions in order to prevent potential cases of violence against children. State-paid support services are also provided to victims of human trafficking.

In cooperation with the World Health Organization, activities have been performed to train medical personnel about domestic and sexual violence issues. Extensive training programmes are also provided to law enforcement officers, judges and social workers. The Ministry of Interior and the State Police are running several Web sites that provide information on available assistance to victims of violence, information for children on security issues in school, family and on Internet, as well as information in three languages on prevention and assistance issues related to human trafficking.

Madam President,

Global efforts, strong political will and commitment are needed to address the root causes of violence against women and girls and to prevent such a shameful phenomenon from happening. Latvia believes that women's political participation and economic empowerment are essential in shaping respectful and equal relationships in the society. As a member of the UN Women Executive Board and its President for 2013, Latvia is strongly committed to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment also globally. To reaffirm our commitment to further increase women's political and economic participation both at

national and international levels, Latvia has expressed the readiness to join the Equal Futures Partnership initiative and to undertake new commitments. In order to contribute to the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1325, the Latvian Government, in close cooperation with civil society organizations, has taken part in international projects aimed at women's empowerment and capacity-building in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries.

Madam President,

In conclusion, let me reiterate Latvia's support to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and invite all the UN Member States to spare no efforts in achieving a substantial outcome at this Session and contributing to our common goal – elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

I thank you.