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STATEMENT

On behalf of the European Union

by

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of Sweden**

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following countries align themselves with this statement: the Candidate Countries 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, the EFTA Countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

2009 marks a milestone in terms of global commitments to the human rights of women. The 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women offers an opportunity to reaffirm our collective commitments, and highlight strategic goals and actions in order to achieve gender equality, the advancement of women and the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women.

Since the creation and adoption of CEDAW in 1979, our common efforts have yielded crucial progress both on national levels and globally. There are many highly visible benchmarks of progress around the world: women as heads of governments, as elected officials in parliaments; women as judges and successful business entrepreneurs and more girls at all levels of education. These accomplishments are worth celebrating.

The fact that the Convention has been supported through 186 ratifications, accessions and successions is also a clear indication of the common commitment of member states to the elimination of all forms of discrimination towards women.

The European Union would also like to congratulate the achievements of the CEDAW committee in monitoring the implementation of the Convention, while recognizing the continuing existence of discriminatory laws and practices against women throughout the world. The EU remains dedicated to the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol, we acknowledge that the Convention's call for equal rights and opportunities between men and women remains as relevant today as it was 30 years ago. The EU would like to reaffirm its strong commitment to urgent eradication of all forms of discrimination against women and girls. Indeed, although women's status and rights have improved over the past decades, countries throughout the world still face major challenges to overcome inequalities between men and women. Women and girls still face multiple forms of discrimination, that often are the result of laws, policies, customs and traditions that restrict women's access to participate fully in development processes and public and political life and have continuously hindered efforts towards the achievements of the MDGs.

In this regard, the EU is deeply concerned that despite the pledge made at the Beijing World Conference on Women and the review by the General assembly at its 23d special session to modify or abolish remaining laws that discriminate against women and girls,

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

many of these laws are still in force and continue to be applied thereby preventing women and girls from enjoying the full realization of their human rights.

Unfortunately there is still a long way to go before the Convention's Optional Protocol gains universal status. The EU urges all member states that have not yet ratified, acceded or succeeded to the Convention and its Optional Protocol, to do so. The EU also urges all states parties to review their reservations and withdraw any reservations which are contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention.

Mr Chairperson,

Despite major achievements, there certainly are remaining challenges. One major issue in combating the discrimination against women is the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. This continues to be of the highest priority for the European Union.

Combating violence against women is an issue that cannot and must not wait. It is rightly termed the most common but least punished crime in the world. One out of two women, suffer this violence at the hands of their intimate partners according to a 2007 World Health Organization study surveying 71 countries. Far too often these crimes go unpunished. The EU urges all states to review applicable laws and to revise them or enact new ones to ensure that violence against women is always criminalized. Also states should secure measures to implement these laws so that perpetrators are brought to justice and further crimes are prevented.

With great alarm, the EU wishes to stress that rape as an organized and systematic weapon of war is a phenomenon that the international community must address with the utmost exigency. Concerted efforts are necessary against this appalling war crime. The EU welcomes the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1888. The EU urges States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court which clearly classify this violation of women's human rights in war times as crime against humanity.

We recognize that women have a major role to play in restoring and consolidating peace and reconstruction. In this connection we urge that all efforts be taken to intensify the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820, in order to ensure compliance with international law, the effectiveness of conflict-resolution, human security, peace-building and the fight against impunity for perpetrators.

The issue of conflict-related sexual violence has to be dealt with in a coordinated manner by the UN system. All branches of the UN should come together behind the vision set out by resolution 1820., and echoed in the Secretary General's report. Gaps in the effort need to be identified and addressed. Accountability must be established. The UN needs to develop a better capacity to gather information about cases of sexual violence, and to address the needs of the victims.

The European Union continues to support, the UN Secretary General's campaign "Unite to end violence against women". The EU's commitment to combat violence against women was reaffirmed last year with the adoption of new foreign policy guidelines to strengthen action in support of the human rights of women.

Mr. Chairperson,

Healthy women with the freedom to participate fully in society is a prerequisite for any country to achieve its full potential for economic and social development. We are concerned of the lack of improvement in the area of maternal health. The latest UN report on the MDGs points out that on the global level, maternal mortality decreased by less than 1 per cent per year between 1990 and 2005. 500 000 women die every year of causes related to pregnancy and child birth. This is not acceptable. It must be addressed by urgent action. The EU also firmly believes that early marriages, female genital mutilation and cutting, as well as violence and killings in the name of honour and other harmful practices, are all incompatible with the rights set forth in CEDAW.

2009 also marks the 15th Anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Cairo Programme of Action. The European Union reaffirms its strong support for, and commitment to, the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994, as well as the key actions for the further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action agreed at ICPD+5 and the Copenhagen Declaration and Action Programme; and also emphasises that gender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and reaffirms that expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and health services are essential for achieving the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Programme of Action and the MDGs.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is a vital part of the UN mandate. Over 15 years have passed since the Vienna Declaration called for the equal status and human rights of women to be integrated into UN's work. The EU recognizes the vital importance of a strengthened United Nations gender architecture in advancing women's rights. We warmly welcome the strong and unanimous support by the General Assembly for the establishment of a 'composite' gender entity within the UN system. The EU believes that the new entity will bring an important shift to the work of the UN in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The EU stands ready to work with other Member States to finalize the remaining details of the new entity. We should set ourselves an ambitious goal, aiming to finish the intergovernmental process in the first quarter of 2010, at the latest. There should be no further delays in operationalising this crucial reform.

Mr Chairperson,

Let us celebrate our achievements and acknowledge our joint successes and struggles won. It will continue to require hard work to improve our laws, legal systems and everyday practices. It will continue to demand improvements of our education systems and health care policies and systems. The European Union reiterates its unfaltering commitment to gender equality and the protection and promotion of equal rights between women, men, girls and boys around the world. The EU remains convinced that we must all do our parts in taking the actions needed, as set forth in our common agreements, to meet the goals we have set for ourselves.

Thank you.