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**General Statement on behalf of the European Union
and its Member States**

By

**H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Hungary**

at the 44th Session of the Commission on Population and Development

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(Check against delivery)

Mr President,

The European Union welcomes the theme “fertility, reproductive health and development” of the 44th session of the Commission on Population and Development.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia¹, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, Montenegro¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

The European Union reaffirms our strong support for and commitment to the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action, 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 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 of Action and the Millennium Development Goals. We also welcome General Assembly resolution 65/234 which extended the Cairo Programme of Action beyond 2014.

Today poor sexual and reproductive health is a leading killer of girls aged 15 to 19 in the developing world. Each year, lack of investment in this critical area leads to 75 million unwanted pregnancies which culminate in 50 million induced abortions, including approximately 20 million unsafe and illegal abortions often with devastating consequences for the woman. This is a major public health concern. In the years remaining till 2015 governments must show significant political and financial commitment directed to save women's lives.

Mr President,

It was at the Cairo Conference where delegates confirmed reproductive rights and first proclaimed the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, which cuts to the core of human existence, progress and survival. The members of the European Union hold the firm belief that the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals will not be achieved unless these rights are vigorously promoted and protected. As we gather here today sixteen years later, we acknowledge that while progress has been made, these rights remain unfulfilled for far too many women, men and young people, with devastating and far-reaching consequences.

To make motherhood safe and achieve MDG5 to improve maternal health, every woman needs three critical reproductive health services: family planning, skilled attendance at birth and emergency obstetric care if complications arise. If these services were guaranteed through strengthened health systems, a woman would not die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth each and every minute. If we are to address these needless deaths Governments must show significant political and financial commitment directed to save women's lives. These actions would also serve to improve maternal and child health and reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

¹ Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The largest generation of adolescents ever in history is now entering sexual and reproductive life and their access to sexual and reproductive health information, education, services and commodities, including male and female condoms, is essential in achieving the goals as set out in Cairo 16 years ago, as well as the fight against HIV/AIDS. The lack of access to such information and services needs to be urgently addressed. This is all the more important when we consider that poor sexual and reproductive health threatens human development, economic growth and social coherence. Motherhood at a very young age entails a risk of maternal death that is greater than average and the children of young mothers have higher levels of morbidity and mortality.

Education is a key factor in sustainable development. The reduction of fertility, morbidity the working population and the promotion of genuine democracy can all be largely assisted by progress in education. In other words, universal access to education, recommended in the ICPD Program of Action, is fundamental to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

Mr President,

Fertility rates have declined in virtually all countries, but the timing and speed of the decline have varied considerably across countries. Our continent in fact can be categorised as a low-fertility region, while in most of the other areas of the world populations continue to grow apace.

The challenge for Europe aside from an ageing population is the fact that fewer women are giving birth at an increasingly later age. Socioeconomic factors explain the rapid and persistent postponement transitions from early to late age-patterns of fertility that have been associated with recent trends towards low-fertility. A steady raise in women's educational levels and participation in the labour market within the European Union is one of the great achievements in the field of gender equality, however these positive changes have not been sufficiently balanced by family-friendly policies, that would make it easier for women to bear and raise children, while not unduly compromising their employment opportunities. Today Member States increasingly pay more attention to develop family-friendly policies which have an important influence on fertility trends.

Mr. President,

In the countdown to 2015, the European Union will accelerate action to guarantee universal access to reproductive health and ensure reproductive health commodity security. We will continue to work closely together with UNFPA, governments, civil society and other partners to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as women's empowerment and gender equality with the aim to achieve the goals set out at relevant international conferences, including the ICPD.

Given the decline in international assistance for family planning, the European Union will do its utmost to increase access to family planning. Meeting the needs of some 200 million women who want to plan and space their births but have no access to contraceptives is a poverty reduction strategy. The target of universal access to reproductive health under MDG5 to improve maternal health paves the way for faster progress.

Finally, we must not forget that, sufficient resources – both domestic and international – are necessary to achieve the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation as well as the wider MDGs. The recent global financial and economic crisis should not put us off-track from meeting our shared international commitments, including those related to the provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA). In this regard, the EU recently reaffirmed its commitments to reaching a collective ODA target of 0.7% of GNI by 2015, to channel at least 50% of its collective aid increases to Africa, and to meet collectively the target of 0.15% to 0.20% of GNP to the Least Developed Countries. The EU hopes to see other donors, including emerging ones, stepping up their own level of ambition.

Thank you for your kind attention.