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**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC
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**General Statement on behalf of the European Union
and its Member States**

By

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(Check against delivery)

Mr. Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the Commission on Population and Development on the behalf of the European Union.

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.

We thank Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe the President of the Economic and Social Council for presenting here today the theme of the annual ministerial review "Current global and national trends and challenges and their impact on education". The European Union believes that providing and promoting education contributes to the full realization of human rights and is critical for sustainable development and achievement of the MDGs. We welcome the adoption of this year's agreed conclusion's of the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which reaffirm the strong commitment of UN Members States to continue progress as regards to access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology and the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work.

Mr. Chair,

The European Union believes in the power of education to transform the lives of individuals and communities. Education is a key factor in achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women, promotion of human rights and fostering sustainable development. Universal access to education is a fundamental prerequisite to achieve all the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

Reductions in fertility have important implications for education and development, both at the national level and for the well-being of families and individuals. Lower fertility enables women to increase their educational attainment and so their participation to the labour force. Having fewer children allow families and governments to invest more in each child. Improvements in child education can be achieved more easily when there are fewer children to compete for the resources and services available

As we have expressed in our previous statements during the past days, the EU strongly believes that improving the quality of and the access to education is indispensable in the promotion not only of sexual and reproductive health but also of gender equality, which constitute a key component of population and development policy. Comprehensive sexuality education – both in and outside school has been crucial and will continue to be of pivotal importance in working towards the full implementation of the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action, the key actions for its further implementation as well as international development goals including the MDGs.

Education on sexual and reproductive health should not be limited to girls and women. Rather, as the ICPD Programme of Action highlights that it is crucial that men and boys are educated both about their own sexual and reproductive health and also about the sexual and reproductive health of their female counterparts. Furthermore, comprehensive sexuality education directly contributes to lowering the incidents of sexually transmitted diseases and improving health

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

outcomes as well as the empowerment of women and to the elimination of various forms of discrimination, and the fight against prejudice and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender stereotypes.

Mr Chair,

HIV and AIDS continues to pose a threat to development and health and well-being of individuals and whole communities. Only by involving, informing and educating both women and men, girls and boys about sexual and reproductive health education, services and commodities, including male and female condoms, that we can successfully combat HIV and AIDS.

Most new HIV infections are spread through unsafe sex. There is therefore a need to further integrate in the context of HIV and AIDS, sexual and reproductive health and rights into policies and programmes, at local, regional and international levels and to address the drivers of the HIV epidemic. Comprehensive sexuality education in and outside of school, access to youth-friendly information and health services, access to affordable and high quality male and female condoms and other forms of prevention and contraceptives and increasing sexual partners services must be part of our response to fight HIV and AIDS. It is especially important that men and boys are informed and educated about their roles and responsibilities. The HIV/AIDS High-Level Meeting this June provides an important opportunity to reaffirm our political commitment and address these issues.

In addition, it is necessary that we continue to work on facilitating and encouraging communication between women and men on issues of sexuality and reproductive health, and the understanding of their rights and responsibilities for their own as well as each other's health and well-being. Encouraging men and boys to become fully involved in policy and programme development that aims to promote human rights and improve gender equality will likely foster changes in attitudes and behaviour patterns and overcome gender stereotypes which are necessary in order to promote and protect the human rights of women and girls and the health of the future generations.

Universal access to education is not yet fully realised. Serious challenges remain; including high drop out rates, especially among girls and minorities and often due to harassment and violence as well as early pregnancies; poverty; and a lack of investment in schools and teachers all of which continue to pose significant barriers in fulfilling internationally agreed goals and commitments. There is a need to expand and improve teacher education and training and systematically integrate gender perspective in programs and to develop gender sensitive curriculum for educational programmes at all levels. We are confident that this year's annual ministerial review will address those global challenges and among them the vital necessity of ensuring comprehensive sexuality education, not least for large and growing generation of adolescents.

Thank you for attention.