



Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

45th session of the Commission on Population and Development

Agenda item 3: Actions in follow-up to the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development

23 April 2012

Mr President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

The acceding country Croatia*, the candidate countries Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland** and Serbia*, the EFTA country Liechtenstein, as well as Ukraine and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

We welcome the thematic focus of this session on “Adolescents and Youth”. Many of young people live in developing countries where development constraints pose the additional challenges of limited access to resources, education, training, employment, health and broader economic development opportunities. Investing in and empowering boys and girls, young women and young men, is key both for young people as individuals and for a sustainable development of our societies.

We believe that this year’s theme is of crucial importance, as it is key for the recognition of the human rights of young women and men and adolescent boys and girls and their specific needs and challenges. It also links to achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and sustainable development. For the European Union and its Member States, the achievement of de facto gender equality is a fundamental right as well as a precondition for economic growth and social cohesion.

The European Union and its Member States reaffirm 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.

Mr President,

* Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

** Iceland continues to be a member of EFTA and the European Economic Area.

The European Union and its Member States attach great importance to the empowerment and full involvement of young women and men, adolescent boys and girls in our societies. The EU and its Member States strongly reaffirm the World Programme of Action for Youth, which constitutes a comprehensive international strategy and guiding policy in the area of youth development, and calls for its continued implementation at the local, national, regional and international level.

Within the EU we have committed to the investment in young people through two key agreements: "Youth in Action 2007-13" is the Programme the European Union set up for young people aiming at young people's active European citizenship and involvement in shaping the EU's future through three main activities: Youth Exchanges, Youth Initiatives and Youth Democracy Projects. The most recent agreement is the Renewed Framework of EU Cooperation in the Youth Field 2010-2018, which involves key policy areas that affect Europe's young people, particularly education, employment, creativity and entrepreneurship, social inclusion, health and well-being, civic participation, volunteering and a better implementation of youth policies at the EU level. A key principle of EU Youth Policy is that it should be firmly anchored in the international system of universal and indivisible human rights, a principle which is also valid in the UN context.

We prioritize full, effective and meaningful participation of youth in decision-making, both at local, national and regional level. The voices of young people are just as important in global governance, especially in the work of the UN. In this context we think it is necessary to continue the good practice of the Secretariat and the Youth Focal point of the UN, of consulting with young people and youth led organizations and allowing them to provide inputs for the different initiatives. In this context we also encourage Member States to include youth delegates in their delegations to relevant UN meetings.

Mr President,

Ensuring that young women and men, adolescents boys and girls have the education, skills, confidence and assets they need to take up opportunities and have decent and secure livelihoods; preventing unwanted and unintended pregnancies and early childbearing; improving adolescent and young people's sexual and reproductive health outcomes; for this, the EU and its Member States believe that:

- Adolescent and young women and men need access to evidence- and rights-based and gender-sensitive comprehensive sexuality education
- All forms of violence against girls and women, including sexual and gender based violence, including coerced sex and crime in name of so-called honour need to be eliminated
- The number of early marriages needs to be reduced and we must support the abandonment of female genital mutilation and cutting
- Education and access to assets and livelihoods must be improved.

Furthermore, evidence- and rights-based and gender-sensitive comprehensive sexuality education directly contributes to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the empowerment of young people and to the elimination of various forms of discrimination including based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Mr President,

HIV and AIDS continue to pose a threat to development and the well-being of individuals and it is only by involving and educating young women and men, girls and boys as well as adults about sexual health that we can successfully combat HIV and AIDS. The High-Level Meeting in June last year provided an important opportunity to reaffirm our political commitment and address these issues.

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.

Mr President,

Our vision comes from best practice from our own countries. Comprehensive sexuality education, youth friendly services, publicity campaigns to help empower young people in standing up against peer pressure and coercion, a public dialogue in society about these difficult subjects, these are issues which EU countries have been trying to address and about which we have learned lessons. Addressing these issues is not easy. Any dialogue between generations may be complex and awkward, as many of us may know. Mutual respect is key. These efforts are necessary and worthwhile, because they benefit not only one group but society as a whole. Investing in young people is a sustainable investment, with high returns on health and social cohesion.

Mr President,

In order to meet the MDG's and remaining committed to the full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)/Cairo Declaration and Programme of Action and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the EU and its Member States will pay special attention to gender equality and the right of women and men to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexual and reproductive health. To this end, the EU and its Member States will work actively to ensure that health systems provide information and health services addressing the sexual and reproductive needs of women, as this is crucial for women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment.

The European Union and its Member States looks forward to the Special Session to be held during the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly to assess the status of implementation of the Programme of Action and to renew political support for actions required for the full achievement of its goals and objectives – as required by GA resolution 65/234. We will engage constructively and actively as we approach this important Special Session.