



European Union

Statement on behalf of the European Union

By

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Economic and Social Council

General Debate on

**"Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments
in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women"**

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I have the honour to address the Economic and Social Council on behalf of the European Union.

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

We welcome this year's theme for the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council on "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women". This matter is particularly relevant in this time for review and assessment. The year 2010 marks the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration and of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Our deliberations during this High-level segment offer an opportunity to place gender equality further on the international agenda and to feed the discussions leading to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Review Summit in September.

Despite substantial progress over the last few decades, women and girls still constitute the large majority of the world's poorest subsisting on less than 1 US dollar a day. Girls are still more likely than boys to have poor access to education, especially regarding secondary and tertiary education. Women are also lacking access to land, property, financial resources and technologies. They are under-represented in governments and decision-making bodies, have fewer opportunities within the labor and financial markets, and are paid significantly less than their male counterparts, even at jobs with the same value.

Additionally, we are faced with the scourge of gender-based violence and rape and other forms of sexual violence are perpetrated in many contexts, including as tactics of war in situations of conflict or post-conflict. Maternal health represents the area where the least progress has been made out of all MDGs, particularly in fragile states. We also know that the challenges of climate change are having specific gender dimensions, especially with regard to female farmers.

In addition to these challenges, we know that the current financial and economic crisis is having a gender-specific impact which, if left ignored, could hamper the progress achieved in gender equality in recent years.

This indeed paints a bleak picture, all the more because it is a well known fact that gender equality and women's rights are not adequately integrated in all MDG targets, which hinders sustained progress on MDGs. Ensuring that both women and men have the same opportunities and rights whether in education, health, social affairs or the economy will undeniably lead to more economic growth and help attain our targets. So, in this critical year of review and assessment, all of us, and by that I mean, international organisations, national governments, civil society and the private sector, need to renew our efforts and further place gender equality at the heart of the development agenda. We therefore have to make sure that the achievement of all MDGs is in line with the commitment made by the international community to realize the full range of women's rights as established by CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and other international treaties. Since Beijing it has been acknowledged by the international community that women's rights are human rights.

¹ The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

In the European Union, equality between women and men constitutes a fundamental value and principle. Since 1957, gender equality has been enshrined in the European Treaties. Since that time, European legislation interpreted in the case law of the European Court of Justice, has created a legal arsenal, which is applied in the 27 EU Member States, giving rise to many success stories all over the continent.

Moreover, a Women's Charter was adopted on 5 March 2010. The five areas of the Charter, namely equal economic independence, equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; equality in decision-making, dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; and the promotion of gender equality beyond Europe will be translated into a new strategy for gender equality between women and men that will be presented in the autumn of this year.

The EU is currently also looking into establishing a comprehensive strategy to increase the scale and effectiveness of commitments to combat violence against women.

Regarding external action, the EU has just recently adopted a Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development for the period 2010-2015, as part of its strategy to achieve the MDGs.

The overarching objective of the Action Plan is to accelerate the achievement of the MDGs, especially MDG 3 and MDG 5, as well as to attain the goals set out by CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action, and the Cairo Program of Action. This Action Plan calls for EU Member States to translate more efforts into actions that can work better and more efficiently. Collective EU actions will certainly enhance our achievements and strengthen progress towards gender equality.

This Action Plan consists of an operational framework with specific actions, indicators and timetables for each of its objectives. It provides for systematic inclusion of gender equality in our political and policy dialogues with partner countries to raise awareness and encourage action. Furthermore, it will involve civil society, particularly women's organisations, in partner countries and in the EU as a whole.

This Gender Action Plan also contains actions to increase technical capacity for gender mainstreaming. Moreover, it aims at making aid more effective and transparent through ensuring that gender equality issues are part of the annual and multi-annual planning process with partner countries; or applying internationally accepted standards in all programmes and projects to track the aid that we devote to this end.

Through this Gender Action Plan we also intend to support partner countries in fully implementing the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. Indeed, fostering gender equality and women's empowerment is also crucial for achieving peace and security. It is necessary to provide sustained support for the protection of women in armed conflict as well as for women's participation in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction and in the political arena. This has a direct link to wider development considerations, such as women's economic security and access to economic opportunities and resources as well as to health services and education.

Mr. Chairman,

Achieving the MDGs can only be done if we look at women as rights-holders and key agents of change that are empowered to contribute to development. Consequently, women's equal participation at all levels of decision-making and strengthening of women's skills and talents is not only a matter of human rights. It can also greatly contribute to addressing the current economic

crisis. Educating women and promoting their access to full employment and decent work as well as access to credit and resources, has a positive multiplier effect on the economy. Consequently, the financial crisis should not be an excuse to decrease national budgets or any other funding for the support of gender equality, including women's civil society groups.

Furthermore, the sharing of responsibilities between women and men does not only enhance the quality of life for all, but also increases women's opportunities regarding education, training, self-care, political activities and therefore contributes to the achievement of the MDGs and the well being of the populations of the respective countries.

Equal participation and equal sharing of responsibilities cannot be achieved if women do not have proper access to health care services and information. In this sense, it is vital we reach universal access to reproductive health and effectively address the feminization of the HIV/aids epidemic. Additionally, studies have shown a link between increased levels of mother's education and chances of child survival with the subsequent positive effect on MDG 4.

Mr. Chairman,

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is a central aim of the United Nations. In view of that, the EU welcomes the breakthrough yesterday in the negotiations on the reform of the UN gender architecture within the broader context of the System-wide Coherence process. We are satisfied that the establishment of a new gender entity has been agreed and look forward to the formal adoption of the GA resolution tomorrow. The EU will provide full support to the smooth functioning of the Board and strong performance of the entity. Strong leadership from the very start will be essential in this regard.

All MDGs hide a number of inequalities, including gender inequalities. Therefore we need more reliable gender-disaggregated data. We will look at the new gender entity to support countries to collect these.

Finally, the EU is firmly committed to support the achievement of the MDGs globally by 2015. The EU remains convinced that the MDGs are interlinked, mutually dependent and reinforcing and therefore require a holistic, rights-based approach which takes into account local contexts. We reiterate our strong commitment to gender equality as a human right, a question of social justice, a driver for peace and development and a core value of the EU development policy, and look forward to a fruitful general debate during this high-level segment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

