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**Making Gender Equality a Reality Today:
“No” to Violence against Women and
Female Genital Mutilation**

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

United Nations High Level Conference on the Status of Women, New
York, 1 March 2010

I am very moved to be here today, with the women of the world, representing the EU's face for gender equality.

For me personally this is a very special moment: 15 years ago I helped to prepare the Beijing Platform as a Luxembourgish representative. Today, as the Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for Gender Equality in the European Union, I speak on behalf of the 250 million women living in Europe.

Since 1957, gender equality has been enshrined in the European Treaties. Since that time, an impressive number of laws and regulations, followed by a great number of decisions of the European Court of Justice, have created a legal arsenal, which is applied in the EU's 27 Member States, giving rise to many success stories all over the continent.

The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights explicitly states that gender equality is a fundamental right. Since December 2009, this Charter is legally binding on the Union and its Member States. **This is why, this week, the President of the European Commission and myself will present a political "Women's Charter", which will be followed by a comprehensive "Gender Equality Strategy".** This Strategy will translate the principles of the Women's Charter into concrete actions.

Much has been done since Beijing, but much more is needed. Although the number of women in employment has risen to nearly 60% on average, there are still serious issues we need to tackle. Only 67% of women with young children are in employment, compared to 92% of men. The work-family balance does not yet favour women. Action is needed and there will be action.

The gender pay gap has barely fallen over the last 15 years. In some countries it has even increased. **This is unacceptable.** Most of all, in times of economic crisis, we could significantly increase GDP by eliminating gender pay gaps. **Also, in this area, I will propose quick action.**

Let me add that in decision-making, women are not yet where they should be. Although there are now 35% of women in the European Parliament, this is not enough. Although there are now nine female Commissioners in the European Commission, there could be more. Not to speak about women in top jobs and decision-making bodies. With the exception of some countries in the world, women are seriously lagging behind. Let us join our forces and change mentalities and facts!

There is another question which should be high on the agenda. That is violence against women. Up to 25% of women in Europe have experienced physical violence at least once during their adult lives and 10% have suffered sexual violence.

I am shocked to hear how women are tortured in war situations. **And I am outraged to know that every day an estimated 6000 girls worldwide suffer female genital mutilation.** That is a brutal crime that cannot be accepted, neither in the European Union, nor anywhere in the world.

I am going to look into these violations of human dignity, proposing a multi-disciplinary package of actions, not excluding European level harmonisation of criminal offences and sanctions in the field of female genital mutilation. This would help addressing the cross-border dimension of this issue which does not end at national borders. We shall leave no stone unturned and we shall not rest until we see violence against women eradicated.

Action for fighting violence against women and female genital mutilation will also be integrated into the EU's development aid policies. The European Union is the largest development aid donor in the world. A part of these means should be channelled into empowering women and making them less vulnerable to exploitation. Anywhere in the world! If we policy-makers do not stand up for women, who else will?!

Beijing was an ambitious start. New York can be a breakthrough, also concerning the set up of the new UN gender equality entity – if we all join forces. And I am confident we will!