



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

UNITED NATIONS
Commission on the Status of Women
52nd Session

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century"**

Agenda Item 3

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union

New York, 25 February 2008

Please check against delivery

Mr Chair,

It is an honour and privilege to address the opening session of the 52nd Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine and Armenia align themselves with this statement.

Let me at the outset congratulate you and other members of the Bureau on assuming the important duty to guide us wisely through the work ahead. I assure you that the European Union will work in strong partnership with other Member States towards reaching agreed decisions aimed at delivering concrete and lasting results of our endeavours to empower women and achieving gender equality.

Mr Chair,

We have reached an important and crucial stage. In the Commission, we will focus for the first time specifically on financing for gender equality and empowerment of women.

All States that have ratified or acceded to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* have thereby committed themselves to supply adequate resources for the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality. Persistent inequalities remind us that we have to live up to our obligations.

The European Union congratulates the CEDAW Committee for its twenty-fifth anniversary and welcomes its valuable contribution to promoting the rights of women and holding governments accountable for implementing their obligations under the Convention.

Legal standards are being reinforced with the policy commitments, including the adoption of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, the *Cairo Programme of Action*, the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly and the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The European Union believes that legal obligations and political commitments must be translated into resource allocation – financial as well as human – for achieving gender equality and women's full enjoyment of human rights and freedoms.

It is also our firm belief that a comprehensive strategy, in close co-operation with all UN entities dealing with gender issues, must be put in place to maximise the efficient use of resources provided for its implementation in order to generate commitments to gender equality, empowerment of women and achieving the MDGs. This would create conditions for the full enjoyment of the right to education, for enhancing the exercise and enjoyment of all human rights of girls and women and freedoms through education. European Union looks forward to examining the progress of the status of the MDG3 on gender equality and empowerment of women at the expected UN high level meeting on the implementation of the MDGs in September 2008 in New York.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilization and Association Process.

Elimination of violence against women and girls is a crucial step in achieving the agreed goals. In this respect the European Union welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to spearhead a multiannual system-wide campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls through 2015. We all need to ensure adequate funding is available to eliminate discrimination against women, promote gender equality, and prevent and redress all forms and manifestations of violence against women and support and assist victims and survivors and ensure their access to justice.

The European Union considers the increase in female employment rates and the quality of jobs the crucial steps for the empowerment of women, the promotion of gender equality and the achievement of the objectives of development, the fight against poverty and for addressing the issue of demographic growth. In light of the steady pay gap between women and men and the female unemployment rates, the European Union identifies the fiscal area as a sector to be addressed to affirm gender equality. Moreover, the European Union considers that additional efforts are needed to increase the number and the quality of jobs.

The promotion of gender equality and the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls are goals in their own right and also instrumental for achieving internationally agreed development goals. The European Union affirms 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.

Mr Chair,

The most important tool governments have for implementing the strategic objectives of the Platform for Action and for achieving other internationally agreed goals is the use of their national budgets in a gender-sensitive manner. The European Union attaches great importance to a dual approach, which implies allocation of adequate funds targeted at empowering women and overcoming gender inequalities and stereotypes on the one hand, and gender-sensitive planning, approving, executing, monitoring and auditing of general budgets on the other.

This view is manifested in the European Commission's multi-year programme and priorities on gender equality, which include actions to encourage gender budgeting at the European Union level and in its Member States.

The European Union recalls the Monterrey Consensus on domestic resource mobilization, which underlines the need for investments in basic economic and social infrastructure to be gender sensitive and for reinforced gender sensitive budgeting.

Mr Chair,

In 2005, while reaffirming the European Union commitments towards a full implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, European Union ministers for gender equality agreed in a declaration *inter alia* to ensure that gender equality bodies and structures have the human and financial resources and capacities necessary for an effective functioning.

Along the same line, in 2006 the Council adopted a set of political conclusions on institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, including a set of indicators to assess the progress at European Union level.

The meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women have proven that without the contribution of women's organisations and other civil society organisations we would not respond proactively to the major concerns of our time, namely poverty, violence against girls and women in all its forms and manifestations, including trafficking and sexual tourism, discrimination against women manifested in gender stereotypes, violations of women's human rights resulting from traditional and cultural attitudes and practices, including in matters related to sexual and reproductive health, the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on women, and violations of women's and girls' human rights in armed conflicts and during peace negotiations and of women refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and internally displaced persons. To reverse the current trend of feminization of HIV/AIDS, the "Conclusions on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation" adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2007 recognize the need to eliminate gender inequalities, gender-based violence and abuse as well as to increase the capacity of women and girls to protect themselves.

The European Union wishes to pay tribute to the important work carried out by women's organisations and other civil society organisations promoting gender equality and calls on governments to make use of the knowledge and experience of such organisations at all levels and provide adequate funding for their activities.

Mr Chair,

The European Union is committed to effective promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment through development cooperation and partnership, and recognizes that gender equality and women's empowerment are of fundamental importance for the achievement of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. Attaining the Millennium Development Goals is our high priority. In 2007 the Council adopted the Conclusions on "*Indicators in Respect of Women and Poverty*", urging the Commission and the Member States to reinforce the systematic implementation and monitoring of a gender mainstreaming in their policies for social protection and social inclusion.

The European Union therefore welcomes the opportunity offered by the priority theme of this Commission to discuss steps that can be taken to reduce gender inequalities and to take actions to empower women through mobilization of resources.

The European Union finds that effective measures to support adequate resource allocation to promote gender equality and women's empowerment are required.

Gender equality is not only based on our overall goal in itself, but is also a means of achieving other development objectives. Concerted action and increased attention to the MDG3 - promoting gender equality and empowering women - is not only important in its own right, but also for achieving all of the MDGs. The importance of enhanced policy dialogue on gender equality and its effective mainstreaming in country strategy papers and in the practice of European Union development cooperation was stressed in the "Conclusions on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation".

Mr Chair, allow me to highlight a few recent developments of the European Union in this respect.

The *European Consensus* adopted in 2005 includes guidelines for action and outlines objectives and five common principles of the European Union's institutions and Member States in development cooperation. One of these principles is gender equality. The *Consensus* highlights the importance of gender equality in the context of the new aid modalities.

The joint European Union commitment to gender equality as a core aspect of EU development policy was strengthened in the "*Conclusions on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation*" adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2007.

We are pleased to mention that within the new thematic programmes, the European Commission has allocated funding for actions aimed at promoting gender equality in the 2007-2013 period that is almost three times higher as compared to that of the previous years.

The EuroMed Ministerial Conference "Strengthening the role of women in society" - held in Istanbul in November 2006 - endorsed a Five Year Framework of Action (2007-2011) to promote gender equality in the region. I would like to inform you that the European Union, together with its EuroMed partners, will present this experience in the course of a parallel event taking place on 29 February.

The European Union believes that adequate funding will deliver sustained results if gender equality and empowerment of women are placed clearly on the agenda of political dialogue between donors and national governments. Furthermore, the key role of women in growth and development must be neither overlooked nor sidelined. No doubt, the inclusion of civil society in the political dialogue process will ensure genuine ownership of development programmes and processes and promote more and sustained results.

Mr Chair,

The European Union considers the issue of the protection of women in situations of crisis and emergencies and women's equal and full participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution and in post-conflict peace-building and reconstruction - at all levels - to be of key importance in the guaranteeing of a lasting peace, sustainable democracy and economic development.

Consistent efforts must be employed to ensure the participation of women in peace negotiations and make their efforts for bringing about peaceful coexistence visible, and to fully recognise their work for the reconciliation of human relationships. Their participation in decision-making processes is instrumental in their engagement in setting priorities for peacebuilding and reconstruction programmes.

The European Union commitment to promote the role of women in peacebuilding and enhance the implementation of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security is reflected in several key policy or programme documents, including the Council conclusions on "*Promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in crisis management*". These conclusions call for a reinforcement of efforts in the implementation of UNSCR 1325, particularly in view of achieving concrete progress in this field. Furthermore, a number of European Union Member States have drafted action plans for implementing the Resolution. Moreover, in the context of the ongoing follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, in 2008 the European Union will develop indicators and prepare a report on the area of concern "Women in armed conflicts".

The European Union welcomes the discussion at this Commission on the inclusion of gender and human rights perspective in the international and national climate change responses and

initiatives. We are aware that female social roles, discrimination against women and poverty are some of the many factors which contribute to different although more severe impacts of climate change on their lives and well-being. The financing for gender equality and empowerment of women correlates with the financing for alleviating these impacts; therefore, we have a unique opportunity to address the promotion of gender equality, empowerment of women and climate change initiatives in a coherent manner.

Before concluding, the European Union wishes to mention an issue, which is not on our agenda, but is nevertheless very relevant for all agenda items we will be dealing with. The strengthening of the United Nations capacity to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and more effectively mainstream the gender issues, including at country level, is essential for the achievement of all our commitments. In this regard, the European Union would encourage any efforts that would lead to the strengthening of UN gender resources and coordination mechanisms; the appointment of a dedicated high level official at the Under Secretary General level is an appropriate way to achieve this objective. All existing or new negotiating avenues should be explored to ensure a speedy reform in this area. The European Union strongly believes that more coherent and coordinated gender strategies and mechanisms aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the UN will enable the UN to boost the gender agenda.

Thank you.