

**Statement
on behalf of the European Union
by**

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**at the opening session of
The Commission on the Status of Women
on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including
caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS**

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(Check against delivery)

Ms. / Mr. Chair,

It is an honour and a privilege to address the opening session of the 53rd Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Croatia* and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine align themselves with this declaration.

Ms. / Mr. Chair,

Let me at the beginning commend the Commission on its important work and congratulate you and other members of the Bureau on continuing the important duty to guide us wisely through the work ahead. We believe that our common goal is to achieve progress in all of the key areas laid out by the Commission, and we assure you that the European Union will work in strong partnership with other Member States to reach an agreement on tangible actions aimed at lasting gender equality and empowerment of women.

Ms. / Mr. Chair,

This year, the Commission will consider the theme of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. The European Union recalls that meeting without delay the international commitments on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men is a necessary condition for achieving de facto gender equality.

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 stressed, that the full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care of children and the maintenance of the household. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action emphasized that women bear a disproportionate work load and household responsibilities. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the International Labour Organization conventions laid down the clear obligation of State parties to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

Furthermore, this is not the first time the Commission has addressed the sharing of responsibilities. One year after the Fourth World Conference in Beijing, the Commission considered the theme of child and dependent care, including sharing of work and family responsibilities, and adopted policy recommendations. Also, agreed conclusions on other priority themes since 1996 have raised the issue of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

Ms. / Mr. Chair,

Although some positive developments have been achieved, there is still much work to be done. We reiterate that equality between women and men is vital to the harmonious

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

development of our societies. It requires the full participation of everyone, male and female, and is not the concern of women alone. Men and women have to be able to enjoy the same rights and opportunities, and, at the same time, they must share responsibilities and tasks, both in the private and public sphere. This calls for an enhanced role of men in building gender equality. Men must be encouraged and enabled to take responsibility for their social and family roles. Women's traditional preponderance in care giving both within and outside the family is a major hindrance to full gender equality. It is, therefore, necessary to promote and implement appropriate measures, such as incentives aimed at encouraging men to take parental and paternity leaves and to share leave entitlements with women, the creation of an economically enabling environment together with adequate and accessible care services for children, elders and other dependant. It also calls for the elimination of gender stereotypes from an early age, namely by providing awareness training to teachers and students, in schools in the labour market and in the media including family leave arrangements, flexible working and opening hours and adequate and accessible care services for children and elders, in order to support an effective reconciliation between work and the private life of women and men.

The EU institutions and EU Member States are currently evaluating the present legal framework supporting reconciliation in order to strengthen workers' legal entitlement to family-related leave and to ensure equal treatment of the self-employed and their assisting spouses.

Enhancing reconciliation of work, private and family life is also one of the six priority areas of action in the Roadmap for equality between women and men for 2006-2010 and measures in this area are closely linked to the related priority of achieving equal economic independence for women and men. This priority was echoed in the European Pact for Gender Equality, agreed upon at the March 2006 European Council.

Since 1999, the Council of the European Union has reviewed the implementation by the EU Member States and the EU institutions of the critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action on a regular and defined basis. A wide set of indicators have been adopted; indicators are necessary to measure and evaluate the outcomes of gender mainstreaming and gender-specific actions. In 2007 the Council of the European Union in its Conclusions on Balanced roles of women and men for jobs, growth and social cohesion acknowledged that women are still often forced to choose between having children and a career, in particular because of the persistence of gender stereotypes and an unequal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities between women and men. As recommended by the Beijing World Conference, it is essential to have data on a regular basis, provided by National Statistical Institutes through the Time Use survey, in order to measure the unpaid family workload of women and men and gender differences in time sharing. This would contribute to the adequate planning of policies supporting an effective reconciliation between private life and family time of women.

In December 2008, the Council of the European Union in its Conclusions on the progress of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action on reconciliation of work and family life called on its Member States, inter alia, to continue to take the necessary measures to encourage men to share family and domestic responsibilities on an equal footing with women, and to promote measures to eradicate gender stereotypes, so as to change the representation of the roles of men and women in work, family and private life and effectively reach a real and balanced sharing of responsibilities between men and women. To this end, it is also necessary to remove and to prevent any forms of gender violence, such as harassment, mobbing and stalking, that represent a real impediment to the full realization of women at the professional and personal level both in the public and the private sphere

Ms. / Mr. Chair,

We welcome the opportunity offered by the priority theme of this Commission to discuss steps that can be taken to reduce gender inequalities and to take action to empower women, specifically in the context of care-giving, including HIV/AIDS.

To reverse the current trend of feminization, the European Union, within the context of established EU positions[†], has successfully led efforts to strengthen global attention and action to address gender inequality, gender-based violence and abuse as drivers of the AIDS pandemic, calling for intensified efforts to safeguard women's and girls' rights, develop effective HIV and AIDS policy programmes and services for women and girls, including those related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHRs) within the context of established EU positions, and to support the full involvement of women in planning and decision making related to HIV strategies and programmes. We are committed to work collectively and individually to support partner countries in implementing strategies for gender equality, women's rights and empowerment and approaches which are effective for women and girls in response to the AIDS pandemic.

The EU 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.

In this regard, the EU supports the need to establish an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach in order to eradicate all forms of violence against women including harmful traditional and customary practices such as female genital mutilation with the cooperation of all the policy sectors involved. The efforts made so far have not been sufficient to stem the world-wide expansion of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, aggravated by poverty and gender, social and economic inequalities. There is therefore an urgent need to accelerate the development and implementation of comprehensive prevention approaches, education and awareness raising, including by upscaling access by pregnant women to antiretroviral treatment and to prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

The European Union considers that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has accentuated the need for increased attention to care-giving, as the care responsibilities are strongly feminized in the private sphere and in the labour market. Care giving responsibilities, especially those carried out without professional training, are assumed disproportionately by girls and women of all ages as compared to boys and men originating the perpetuation of gender inequalities in all walks of life and throughout the life cycle. Therefore, a gender equality dimension must be incorporated into all HIV/AIDS policies and programmes, since girls' and women's access to education, economic resources and health services including contraception and condoms help to reduce the risk of HIV infection. This would include continued investment in support of the development of an acceptable prevention tool that empowers women, such as an effective microbicide. Men must also be encouraged and enabled to take

[†] The European Consensus on Development, OJ C 46 of 24.2.2006; Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Recently emerging issues regarding HIV/AIDS (doc 7227/07, including the Statement in the Annex); Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation (doc. 9561/07) and a European programme for action to confront HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis through external action (doc. 9278/05).

responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behaviour and to understand women's and men's joint responsibilities, so they can be equal partners in public and private life.

Ms. / Mr. Chair,

Gender equality, women's empowerment, non-discrimination and full enjoyment of human rights are core principles and values for the European Union. The European Union will work further both internally and through external action towards policy responses to promote equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. On the practical level as a major donor to the Global Fund against AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, the European Union, has been involved in the development of the Global Fund gender equality policy and financed Global Fund supported projects to train caregivers and provide financial and other support to households that include people living with HIV and children orphaned by HIV. The EU has recently reaffirmed that women's rights are priority of its policy to defend human rights, and a subject for long-term action by the European Union. To this end, the Council adopted guidelines which make respect for women's rights and combating violence against them a priority of the external action of the European Union and its Member States.

The EU is also of the opinion that the Human Rights Council has a major role to play in promoting women's rights and gender equality. The mandate of the special rapporteur on violence against women and her work are key and need to continue being firmly supported. There is an ongoing discussion to introduce a new mechanism dealing with women's rights within the Human Rights. The EU participates with great interest in the reflection to introduce a mechanism dealing with discrimination against women that would complement the existing instruments.

Looking forward to actively participating in the international Parliamentary Conference on the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, 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.

The European Union takes this opportunity to highlight that during the Czech Republic's Presidency we will focus on equal opportunities for men and women over the age of 50 and their active life and dignified ageing and also on new ways to overcome gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the European Union is pleased to announce that in 2009 the European Institute for Gender Equality will be in operation and start carrying its activities to collect, analyse and disseminate relevant objective, comparable and reliable information as regards gender equality as well as to foster the exchange of experience and the development of dialogue on gender equality on the European level.

Ms. / Mr. Chair,

The European Union also welcomes the topic of the review theme * Equal participation of women and men in decision-making process at all levels, since improving the situation in these area is crucial for the accelerated implementation of gender equality in practice.

The European Union also welcomes the topic of the emerging issue - The gender perspectives of the financial crisis. Across the globe, we are now operating in a more uncertain economic environment. There is a need to work together to ensure that gender equality does not fall victim to this new economic scenario and gender differences in employment rates should not increase. Women's increased participation in the labour market is absolutely necessary for a productive economic development, so greater equality in labour market and greater equality in the sharing of the family and household responsibilities are inseparable in this process. We must also ensure that adequate social policies are adopted to avoid the risk of women poverty.

The EU welcomed the adoption in June 2008 of resolution 1820 on "Women and peace and security", eight years after adoption of resolution 1325, which explicitly acknowledges that sexual violence during armed conflicts may constitute a real weapon of war, and that it may be an obstacle to the restoration of international peace and security. The EU is firmly committed to applying both these resolutions.

The EU wishes to reiterate the importance of strengthening the United Nations system's capacity to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. We have made considerable progress so far, and it is our strong conviction that this progress needs to be build upon and continued. In this regard, the EU looks forward to working with other Member States to ensure a speedy reform with a view to taking substantive action during the 63rd session of the General Assembly using the appropriate negotiation channels in order to guarantee a more coherent and coordinated gender mechanism that will enable the UN to work in a more efficient and effective manner.

Ms. / Mr. Chair,

The European Union looks forward to working with other Member States to promote our common goals and to advance the work of the Commission on the Status of Women in its commitment to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Thank you.

