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**Statement by**

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**Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-  
giving in the context of HIV/AIDS**

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**Check against delivery**



Mr./Ms. Chair,

It is an honor to address the 53<sup>rd</sup> Commission on the Status of women. During the session, the Presidency of the EU has reported on EU activities in the areas covered by the discussions and I would like to complement this information.

Gender equality is a fundamental value of the European Union and has been enshrined in its Treaties since its very beginning. This long standing commitment is visible through the comprehensive body of EU legislation guaranteeing equal treatment between women and men but also at the heart of many EU policies thanks to the principle of gender mainstreaming. This is most notably the case as regards the external policies of the European Union, including external relations and development and cooperation policies.

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Mr./Ms. Chair,

The European Commission welcomes the fact that the priority theme of the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the CSW is the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS. Let me remind you that the second priority area of the European Commission's Roadmap for equality between women and men is "enhancing reconciliation of work, private and family life". It is a key policy in order to support gender equality on the labour market and the financial economic independence of women.

Over the last few years, EU Member States have supported a continuous increase in female participation in the labour market and equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, through the provision of care services, flexible working arrangements and leave arrangements. This has been supported by the European Cohesion Funds, notably the ESF (European Social Fund) that co-funded specific and targeted measures in the EU Member States. The Fifth Programme linked to the Framework strategy of equality between women and men (in the period 2001-06) and the gender equality section of the EU PROGRESS Programme (since 2007) have also funded projects in the field of gender equality involving civil society, social partners and local authorities. The areas addressed by these EU projects have included "promoting change in gender roles and overcoming gender stereotypes" and also "the role of men in the promotion of gender equality, in particular the role of men and fathers in the reconciliation of work and private life".

Moreover, the European Commission has played a key role in monitoring EU Member States policies, notably in the field of employment, and proposing, when necessary, country-specific recommendations in the context of the European employment strategy which is the coordination tool of national policies.

Most recently, in October 2008, the European Commission presented a package of initiatives on reconciliation between work, private and family life in order, most importantly, to improve the EU legal framework in the area of leave arrangements and to highlight the importance of further developing care services, notably for young children.

As already pointed out by the Presidency of the EU during its statement, two proposals for revising the EU legislation in family related leave have been proposed by the

European Commission and are now being discussed by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament. In addition, the European social partners, following a consultation by the European Commission launched in 2006, have agreed to negotiate improvements to their framework agreement which is the basis of the existing parental leave (1996) EU directive.

Monitoring progress in the field of gender equality is very important and the European Commission has further developed the statistical capacity of the EU in order to provide timely and good-quality data in the field of reconciliation between work, private and family life. This is the case, for instance, in the field of time-use surveys, childcare coverage, earnings differences between women and men, and gender statistics in general.

Moreover, the European Commission presents each year a specific report on equality between women and men in the EU, identifying challenges and priorities for the future, which is presented to the Spring Council of EU Heads of States and governments. The latest report documents progress in narrowing the gender gap in employment rates but points to the persistence of other gender gaps including in relation to pay.

Finally, the European Commission follows closely the implementation of its Roadmap for equality and presented a mid-term report in November.

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Ms./Mr Chair,

In addition to the comments already made by the EU Presidency, I would like to provide some information on the policies and actions taken by the European Commission of relevance to the area of gender responsibilities in the context of care giving, including HIV/AIDS.

The European Commission has persistently stressed the need to address gender inequality as a social driver for the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and promote gender sensitive and gender balanced approaches to HIV/AIDS. The European Programme for Action to Confront HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis Through External Action (2007-2011), which forms the basis for collective action of the European Commission and EU Member States, emphasizes the need to promote gender equality and address the fact that girls and women carry a heavier burden and are affected more often and at an earlier age by HIV/AIDS than men.

Consequently, the European Commission is working closely with the EU Presidencies on the efforts to strengthen global attention and action to address the feminization of HIV/AIDS.

Our strategies are based on our broader commitment to support scaling up towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. We need now to get ahead of the epidemic, if we want to see a reduction in the morbidity and the mortality, and the numbers of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, which ultimately will reduce the care giving burden related to HIV/AIDS.

The European Commission is working with the EU Member States to ensure that the EU as a major international development partner collectively contributes to bridge the financing gaps for HIV/AIDS. The Commission also provides predictable and sustainable financing, which allows partner countries to strengthen health and social sectors.

In the context of an ongoing progress review, we are currently exploring with EU stakeholders how we can sustain and strengthen the EU's collective role in support of country responses of HIV/AIDS and translate policies into concrete country action and impact. Among the selected priorities are the areas of gender and HIV, comprehensive care and support for people affected by HIV/AIDS, human rights, and accelerated action for prevention.

Gender equality is an important cross cutting priority, which has to be addressed in all areas of development cooperation. In the context of HIV/AIDS, it is evident that we cannot confront the epidemic effectively, if we do not promote gender equality and ensure gender sensitive and gender balanced approaches. Similarly, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is severely impacting women, and will require continued strong attention in our efforts to ensure gender equality and women's rights.

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Mr./Ms. Chair,

The European Commission also welcomes the topic of the review theme of the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the CSW - the equal participation of women and men in decision making processes at all levels.

We believe that it is a democratic and economic necessity and the current economic situation makes it even more important to mobilize all talents. This is not the time to waste skills and production potential because of outdated perceptions of women's and men's roles and leadership abilities.

While there has been undeniable progress over the last decade, women are still under-represented in all spheres of power in the majority of EU Member States, as well as within EU Institutions.

The Commission supports action in this field; it collects, analyses and disseminates comparable data through a specific database and trends report and encourages networking among stakeholders. To this end, a European network to promote women in decision making positions in politics and the economy has been established.

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Mr./Ms. Chair,

Equal participation of women and men in decision making processes is also key to the promotion of peace at international level.

The European Commission remains determined to contribute to the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security. Last December EU Ministers for Foreign Affairs adopted a new "Comprehensive Approach of the European Union" for the implementation of 1325 and 1820. This policy document presents a 'vision' of the role and obligation of regional actors, like the EU, in protecting women in conflict situations and promoting their role as peace-builders. It engages the European Commission, for instance, to improve monitoring activities on women's rights at the field level, to strengthen gender equality training for our officials, as well as to mainstream 1325 and 1820 in both political dialogues and external assistance with third countries.

We are determined to make substantive progress in time for 2010, when we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of resolution 1325. Further to the call of over forty women international leaders - who joined Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner in Brussels in March 2008 to discuss "Women: Stabilizing an Insecure World" - the UN Secretary-General has expressed his support for the proposal of organizing, in 2010, a ministerial conference to take stock of progress achieved and to examine ways to enhance the impact of resolution 1325.

The tenth anniversary of resolution 1325 offers a great opportunity to foster national and international actions on women's empowerment in conflict situation, including through the mutual exchange of experiences. We have already started discussing with our partners how we can collectively and individually – as Member States and regional organizations – get prepared for the 2010 review conference of resolution 1325. For instance, two weeks ago, the European Commission and the African Union Commission jointly organized here in New York a seminar on the contribution of regional organizations to the implementation of resolutions 1325 and 1820. The recent "International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership, Development, International Peace and Security", in Monrovia is another step in the ongoing international debate in the run-up to the 1325 anniversary. At the field level, and in the framework of the "EC-UN Partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace" -the European Commission is closely co-operating with UNIFEM and the ILO to improve donor coordination for the enhancement of governments' responses to resolutions 1325 and 1820. Finally, in the context of political discussions with our partner countries, we urge them to enhance their policies to implement resolution 1325 and we stand ready to assist them in their efforts.

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Mr./Ms. Chair,

The European Commission welcomes the choice of the emerging theme of the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the CSW, namely the gender perspectives of the financial crisis. The European Commission is very concerned by the severity of the current economic crisis and its social impact worldwide. It will pay close attention to the specific impact on the situation of women and men in the labour market but also to the increased risk of poverty, discrimination, social exclusion or violence.

As the European Commission stated in the latest annual report on equality between women and men, "to confront the economic downturn it will be more important than ever to invest in human capital and social infrastructure, enabling both women and men to use their full potential". Decades of shared efforts for gender equality in the EU have not only improved the situation and rights of women, but also underpinned the economic and social development of our societies. Although the economic slowdown has changed the context, it will be important to continue to strengthen gender equality policies.

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Mr./Ms. Chair,

Thanks for giving me this opportunity to share with you part of the work of the European Commission on gender equality.