



*Présidence française de l'Union Européenne  
French Presidency of the European Union*



## **63<sup>ème</sup> ASSEMBLEE GENERALE**

**Troisième Commission  
Point 56 – Promotion des femmes**

**New York, le 13 octobre 2008  
(Vérifier au prononcé)**

**Déclaration prononcée au nom de l'Union européenne**

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## **63<sup>RD</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Third Commission  
Item 56 – Advancement of Women**

**New York, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
(Check upon delivery)**

**Statement on behalf of the European union**

Mr President,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

Sixty years have passed since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed in Paris on 10 December 1948. This founding text clearly affirms that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” and that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as (...) sex”.

Yet women all over the world unfortunately too often still face wide-ranging discrimination which prevents them from fully realizing their rights and their potential, participating in political and economic life and decision-making processes and enjoying developments in the fields of participation to economic activities, education, health, housing and access to credit.

The scope of our task is immense. Much remains to be done in order to fully realize women’s rights. Women are the most affected by socio-economic inequalities. Improving the condition of women is one of the principal aims of the Millennium Development Goals. All of the eight MDGs directly concern women, in particular objective 3 “promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, objective 5 “improve maternal health”, and objective 6 “halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other pandemics”. We must redouble our efforts to achieve these objectives.

In many countries women are still second-class citizens whose legal rights are inferior to those of men, despite the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, to which 185 States are parties. They are still the principal victims of domestic and sexual violence, notably in armed conflicts where rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence tend to be regarded in an intolerable way as a true weapon of war whose use is planned in an increasingly massive and systematic way. Moreover, women are still largely underrepresented in the political and economic spheres, within UN Member States and UN institutions which must set an example.

The strengthening of the United Nations capacity to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment and to more effectively mainstream gender issues, including at country level, is essential for the achievement of all our commitments. The European Union supports the creation of a new gender entity, to be directed by an Under-Secretary General, that would improve delivery and bring together the normative and analytical functions of the existing architecture with both a technical, policy-setting and programmatic role. In this regard, the EU joined consensus on the decision contained in resolution 62/227, requesting the Secretary General to provide a further detailed modalities paper, focusing in particular on the “composite entity option”, with a view for the General Assembly to take action during its current session.

Women are an incomparable asset for our societies. They are at the heart of their development. We must therefore all pledge to support the advancement of women without which no sustainable development is possible. Women also have a major role to play in restoring and consolidating peace and reconstruction. This is why we must strengthen the implementation of UNSC resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace and Security. Women should also be fully-fledged actors in political life capable of asserting themselves as active citizens and represented in sufficient numbers in institutions. Gender parity in political life and gender equality are central to democracy. These are the same conclusions reached at a conference on “Women: Stabilising an

Insecure World”, promoted by European Commissioner for External Relations last March. Following this initiative, more than 40 prominent international women leaders wrote to the UN Secretary-General, inviting him to convene in 2010 a ministerial conference on the implementation of resolution 1325.

For many years now, the European Union has been supporting the advancement of women and promoting women’s rights.

The full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action is at the core of our commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The European Union is currently working towards the adoption of Council Conclusions on indicators on “Women in Armed Conflict” - one of the priority areas of the Beijing Platform for Action - and is preparing a report in this area of concern. This set of indicators follows a series of others, already adopted, such as on women and decision-making, violence against women, women and health, education and training of women, sexual harassment, and women and poverty.

The European Union attaches great importance to the universalization and the full implementation of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and its Optional Protocol. The European Union continues to call upon States Parties to withdraw all reservations that are contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention and urges all Member States that have not yet ratified, acceded or succeeded to the Convention and the Optional Protocol to do so. In addition, the European Union welcomes the valuable contribution of the CEDAW Committee to promoting the rights of women and in holding governments accountable for implementing their obligations under the Convention.

At the United Nations, it actively supports a significant number of resolutions and actions for the universal recognition of women’s rights. Every year since 2003, the European Union has thus supported resolutions presented by its Member States for further combating violence against women. Resolution 61/143 on the Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women adopted in 2005 by consensus by the General Assembly constitutes a major development in this respect and we must continue to work for its full implementation.

This long-standing commitment was again reaffirmed this year with the European Union’s decision to strengthen its action in support of women’s rights and to combat violence against women by adopting new guidelines in the CFSP framework on combating violence against women. The EU hence places women’s rights at the core of its foreign policy priorities both politically and financially. Within the EU, the still inadequate representation of women and the difficulties they may be confronted with in society, economic life and the work world are addressed by many policies and programmes.

The European Consensus on development 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. Gender equality is one of these five principles. 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.

Gender equality is an inescapable and undeniable principle over which the EU cannot compromise. It is also an inalienable right that women must be able to invoke as necessary and assert at all levels of society.

The EU affirms our strong support for and commitment to the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994, 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 can not 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.

We call on the international community to intensify its action in support of women's rights and prohibit sex-based discrimination. We would like to demonstrate our appreciation and recognition of the work, role and value of the Commission of the Status of Women as a unique forum of dialogue and exchange in our common efforts to respond to challenges in the achievement of gender equality, both those that we have witnessed along the years and the new ones emerging in our changing world.

The European Union greatly valued the opportunity to participate in many important debates at the 52nd session of the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW52), including on the priority theme of "financing for gender equality and empowerment of women". The European Union considers that the CSW52 agreed conclusions should be taken into account during the Follow-up Doha Conference on Financing for Development.

Women can hope to attain peace, security and well-being not only through universal recognition of their rights, but also through the advancement of women within the societies themselves.

The European Union believes that women have an essential role to play. More than ever before, we must defend and promote their rights and their role and place in the societies of all United Nations Member States.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia\* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this declaration.

Thank you.

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