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Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security

Statement by

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on behalf of the European Union

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Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries, Turkey, Croatia¹ and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

Mr. President,

Security Council Resolution 1325 is a landmark on the road towards gender equality and the full recognition of the role women play in society, especially in peacekeeping, peacebuilding and post conflict situations.

The EU is extremely concerned with recent reports by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes and others, on the appalling and unprecedented phenomenon of systematic rape and brutality against women in Eastern Congo. Sadly, this demonstrates an apparent incapacity of the international community to protect or prevent a worsening of the violations against women, and the importance of furthering the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325.

In this context, the European Union supports the process of formulating a National Action Plan on the 1325 Resolution, which was launched by the Congolese authorities on 19 September.

The rights of women and girls and gender equality are at the core of various international instruments well known to us all: from the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Beijing + 5, the 2005 World Summit Outcome and the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The EU abides by those instruments and actively seeks to promote their full implementation, not only within its membership but also in its policies towards third countries.

In 2006 the European Commission launched a new four-year Roadmap Strategy for Equality between Women and Men, setting concrete objectives and actions in priority areas such as equal representation in decision-making, eradication of all forms of gender-based violence, and the promotion of gender equality in external and development policies. Commitments to promote the role of women in peacebuilding and enhance the implementation of UNSCR 1325 are also reflected in the 2006 EU Joint Concept for support to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration and the Communication on gender in development cooperation.

¹ Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the stabilisation and Association Process

Mr. President,

Nowadays, gender equality concerns are mainstreamed in our development and cooperation policies and in the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

Of the many EU projects and programmes on the issue of women and conflict, one can cite the three-year partnership with UNIFEM launched in April 2007 to build capacity and improve accountability for gender equality in 12 countries, with a specific focus on women in peacebuilding and the implementation of UNSCR 1325; the support of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights for women's participation in peace processes in Colombia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia; and the EU Conflict Prevention Network which will be exploring ways for assuring the effective implementation of Resolution 1325 by the international community, governments and local civil society organisations.

Implementation of UNSCR 1325 is also a concern in the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership and the EU policy on situations of fragility. Beyond this, there is a strong gender dimension in all the EU's development cooperation, and this is reflected in its geographical and thematic programmes, for example in the new programme "Investing in people".

The EU Council Conclusions on gender equality and gender mainstreaming in crisis management, adopted in November 2006, are currently being implemented in all levels of ESDP missions. The Council stressed the importance of fully implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 from the early planning to the conduct and evaluation of ESDP missions and operations. The EU has also prepared a handbook on mainstreaming human rights and gender into ESDP, which is a practical tool to be used in the ESDP operations.

Accordingly, a gender perspective crosscuts the different dimensions of the EU's external action, including crisis management, post-conflict reconstruction; disarmament; demobilisation and reintegration; security sector reform; peacebuilding and rule of law activities.

Measures under implementation focus on improving gender balance in ESDP operations; promoting the role of women in peacebuilding; enhancing protection of women and girls affected by armed conflict; promoting dialogue with local and international women's groups; and raising awareness and providing training on gender to ESDP staff.

Particular emphasis has been put in including measures against sexual and gender based violence in transitional justice mechanisms, pointing out that peacebuilding and reconstruction plans should include comprehensive victim-protection and support mechanisms.

In this regard, the EU also welcomes the draft Policy Statement and draft Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel, and the upcoming work on Criminal Accountability of United Nations Officials and Experts on Mission. The EU is committed to working towards the creation of a clear UN framework

to respond to situations of sexual exploitation and abuse and will stay actively engaged in the discussions of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

These are crucial steps to ensure that the Zero-Tolerance Policy for acts of abuse and sexual exploitation is accomplished. We are looking forward to work with all partners in driving the gender equality agenda forward in this field.

On the other hand, we must not forget the preventive dimension with regard to gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. In the EU context this includes the development of rules of conduct as the Generic Standards of Behaviour, which are binding on ESDP staff, forbidding involvements in sexual exploitation, trafficking in women and prostitution. The EU would support the elaboration of corresponding rules and practices for the UN operations and missions.

Mr. President,

The EU is deeply concerned about the continued use of sexual violence against women in current conflict situations. We believe that the impact of violence against women has manifest consequences for the success and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts, and this is a subject which demands the attention of the Security Council. The EU would welcome a report by the Secretary-General on the global problem of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in both conflict and post-conflict situations, to highlight the implications and consequences for peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities.

Support must also be directed to strengthening the judicial and legal systems, particularly in those countries going through protracted crises.

We welcome initiatives such as the Stockholm High-Level Meeting on "Building Partnerships for Promoting Gender Justice in Post-Conflict Societies", and the follow-up High-Level African Regional Meeting on "Advancing Gender Justice in Conflict Affected Countries" held earlier this year in Cape Town. Such initiatives provide valuable input for promoting women's participation in the justice system.

Mr. President,

The EU would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Peacebuilding Commission for the achievements of its first year of work.

We believe that the PBC is a privileged forum to address gender equality and thus contribute to women's active participation in post-conflict reconstruction and institution building processes, including in decision-making.

We recognise the efforts undertaken to consider gender equality issues in the work of the PBC, both in country-specific work and in thematic discussions, as highlighted in the report of its first session. As recognized in the reports on Burundi and Sierra Leone, the EU urges the Commission to consider gender equality as a decisive cross-cutting issue also in the future Integrated Peacebuilding Strategies (IPBS).

In addition, it is crucial to include women in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes, taking into account women's capacity to contribute to stability and decision making in a society as well as taking into account the vulnerability and special needs of women and girls. Let us not forget as well the importance of promoting men's awareness of their role in turning gender equality into a reality in every dimension of life.

Mr. President,

The EU welcomes the work of the Office of Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and its reports on the progresses made in the implementation of the 2005-2007 System-wide Action Plan, on the proposals for an updated plan for the 2008-2009 period, and on the collection of good practices and lessons learned in the implementation of Resolution 1325.

The EU is aware that much remains to be done, including at national level, to ensure that gender inequality is addressed, and supports the enhancement of mechanisms to further advance the implementation of Resolution 1325. Monitoring and reporting systems must be improved in order to ensure enhanced accountability.

The EU Council Conclusions adopted in 2006, invited EU Member States to pursue active recruitment strategies and to identify and address specific obstacles limiting women's participation in the ESDP operations.

Also at the UN level, additional efforts need to be undertaken to increase the number of women, particularly in senior positions, in peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions.

The EU strongly believes that equal participation of both women and men in conflict and post-conflict decision making as well as in peace processes provides conditions for more stable and more secure societies.

Cooperation is essential, and we will continue to actively collaborate with UN agencies, regional organisations – such as the AU, OSCE, NATO – NGO's, and all relevant stakeholders. We also believe that it is of great importance to provide information to the broader public on the implementation of Resolution 1325.

We are ready to work together with the Secretary General and to take into account the recommendations of his latest report on women, peace and security in our policies and programmes.

Thank you Mr. President.