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Mr Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

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

Women from all over the world have through their action demonstrated their resolve to contribute to promoting development and open government in their countries and have put into practice the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in one of the most ratified human rights conventions, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Women are a part of their countries' future. The future and success of their countries is dependent on ensuring their equal role and right to participate in political, economic and social life. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action committed States to women's full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power. This is fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace, and essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government. We reiterate our strong support to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which remains a highly relevant and valuable normative instrument.

Women in North Africa and the Middle East took leading roles pushing for transformation - as human rights defenders, political organisers, lawyers, doctors, bloggers, and journalists - supplying valuable skills and information needed to bring about positive change. These popular movements reaffirmed the universal yearning for freedom from fear and repression, and women of all walks participated prominently. Gender does not matter when striving for political change, nor should it be an excluding factor in the political processes that follow. Not least because it would mean squandering valuable and scarce resources desperately needed to bring about

lasting transformation and to deal with a multitude of political, social and economic issues.

No country has achieved full gender equality, but there are lessons we can share. The European Union stands ready to support women's participation in political and social processes, including by sharing experience on all measures to increase women's political participation.

Women in decision-making positions, either in the public or private sector, should become the norm rather than singular, hard-won exceptions. The commitment to break down barriers to women's political and economic empowerment was also expressed in the high-level event in the margins of UNGA 67<sup>th</sup> Ministerial week on the Equal Futures Partnership: Women's political participation and Economic Empowerment co-founded by US, Australia, Benin, Bangladesh, Denmark, Finland, Indonesia, Jordan, the Netherlands, Peru, Senegal, Tunisia, and the EU. Despite the 30% target of women at decision-making levels endorsed by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1995, women represent less than 20% of members of national parliaments and even less among government ministers. The target endorsed by ECOSOC has been achieved by less than 30 countries. Women continue to be underrepresented in the lists of political candidates. The obstacles to women's political participation identified in Beijing, including to women standing for office, persist: discriminatory societal attitudes, family responsibilities, costs associated with seeking and holding office, but often also the set working patterns of political parties. At worst, women taking part in public life and decision-making become targets of attacks aimed at discouraging any future participation.

Women and women's perspectives also need to be represented at all high-level international discussions - on security, development, human rights and the environment, including in the MDG post-2015 process. Studies confirm that women play an instrumental role in safeguarding scarce natural resources.

Women's economic empowerment and their full participation in economic life are crucial for development and improving the general quality of life globally. As stated in the World Development Report 2012 Gender Equality and Development, gender equality is smart economics: it can enhance economic efficiency and improve other development outcomes, as well as make institutions more representative.

Mr Chair,

Gender equality is a fundamental right enshrined in the EU Treaty and guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. A large body of European legislative texts dedicated to equality between women and men over the life course covers, amongst others, equal access to employment, equal pay, maternity protection and parental leave. In 2010 the European Commission adopted the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men for 2010-2015 to enhance its action in the field of gender equality. In addition, in March 2011, the Council of the European Union adopted the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020, reaffirming the EU commitments in this area. In May 2011, the European Commission presented a package of measures aimed at strengthening the rights of victims of crime. A number of the measures, to be implemented by the Member States, are expected to have a positive impact particularly on women suffering from different forms of violent crime. Its final adoption is foreseen soon. In June 2012 the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy has been adopted where concrete actions regarding women are envisaged.

The European Union and its Member States affirm their strong support for and commitment to the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action as well as the key actions for further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action agreed at ICPD+5, and the Copenhagen Declaration and Action Programme; and also emphasise 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.

In addition, the Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development for 2010-2015 helps guide the EU's external action in this domain over the coming years. This Plan of Action which is currently being implemented is part of the EU's strategy to accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly MDG 3 on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and MDG 5 regarding improving maternal health. It also seeks to attain the goals set by CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Cairo Programme of Action. It establishes a basis for the systematic inclusion of gender equality in the EU's political dialogues with partner countries and for the involvement of civil society,

particularly women's organisations, both in partner countries and in the EU. It also contains actions to increase technical capacity for gender mainstreaming.

In 2011 we welcomed the official launch of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, created by a historic decision of the General Assembly in 2010. UN Women has now set out to fulfil the crucial task of addressing the gaps in the UN support for gender equality and the empowerment of women: providing a linkage between normative and operational action, promoting gender mainstreaming across the UN system and strengthening accountability in these fields. EU intensified its cooperation with UN Women by signing in April 2012 a Memorandum of Understanding that brings more strategic partnership on gender and justice, women's leadership and political participation; women's access to economic empowerment; combating sexual and gender based violence; humanitarian aid; women, peace and security and women's empowerment in global issues.

Mr Chair,

Women's participation is also one of the main principles reaffirmed in the UN Security Council resolution 1325(2000) and the subsequent Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. Women's representation in all stages of peace processes and among mediators and peacemakers remains regrettably low. We consider the engagement and support of women raises the chances for building a peace that lasts. The EU concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities has set a policy goal of promoting the representation of women and the availability of adequate resources for dedicated mediation gender expertise from an early stage of mediation processes onwards.

The European Union and its Member States remain strongly committed to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions. We attach high significance to the Security Council decision to take forward the set of indicators tracking the implementation of resolution 1325, and welcome the ongoing work on their operationalisation. In 2008 the EU adopted the Comprehensive Approach for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and 1820. In March 2012 the EU reported on its implementation of these resolutions in the context of our Common Security and Defence Policy. Today, almost all of our 15 ongoing civilian missions and military operations have a human rights and or gender advisor on the ground. We conducted lessons identified on the

mainstreaming of human rights and gender aspects into our Common Security and Defence Policy in 2010 and we are stepping up pre-deployment training efforts on gender. Around half of all EU Member States have adopted national action plans with the aim of strengthening their action on UNSCR 1325.

The EU also established indicators in 2010 to evaluate and assess gaps in its own action in this regard. The first report based on the indicators was published in May 2011. The EU is active on the issue of women, peace and security in more than 70 countries. Its support amounts to about 200 million euros a year for the development and implementation of national action plans, funding for non-governmental organisations, and training for governmental agencies. However, in terms of the number of women represented in peace negotiations, more work needed to be done in being able to gather accurate data.

The European Union commends the work of the former Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms Margot Wallström and the Team of Experts on Rule of Law aimed at implementing the UNSC resolutions 1820, 1888 and 1960. The EU welcomes the nomination and supports the work of the new Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms Zainab Bangura. The EU supports actions aimed at ending impunity for sexual violence in conflict and providing an integrated approach to prevent and punish acts of sexual violence, as well as to bring justice, services and reparation to its victims.

The EU supports the work of Ms Rashida Manjoo, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. Under the EU action plan for justice policies 2010-2014, the EU provides help for the protection of victims of crime, including women victims of violence and genital mutilation as well as financial support to civil society, universities and local authorities, to combat violence and support victims.

The EU continues to work on implementing its own Guidelines on combating violence and discrimination against women and girls through its delegations and the Embassies of the EU Member States around the world. The EU will shortly launch regional campaigns with different partner countries focused on female genital mutilation, sexual violence in armed conflict, women's political participation and forced/early marriage. EU will also finance awareness raising campaigns on FGM within its Member States. In order to support

women in fully realizing their potential, we also believe it is important to address issues such as harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation/cutting. In this light, we welcome that in 2012 the Commission on Status of Women again addressed the issue of FGM and took the decision to bring it to the General Assembly.

Mr Chair,

Women have visibly and boldly stepped up to shape the future of their countries, societies and families and to guarantee that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are enjoyed by all, free from fear and violence. These rights equally belong to women themselves. We will continue to work in cooperation with all partners to make these rights a reality for everyone.

Thank you.

\* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process