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**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 853
Vienna, 10th March 2011**

EU statement on the occasion of the International Women's Day

The EU would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the Joint statement by the 'High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-president of the European Commission Catherine Ashton and European Commission Vice-President Viviane Reding on the International Women's Day', issued on the 8th March:

"Today we celebrate the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. For the past century, this important occasion has marked the economic, social, political and cultural achievements of women around the world. Women have struggled throughout history for more rights and greater freedom of choice and liberty. We take this opportunity to reiterate jointly our commitment to promote women's rights and gender equality. Only by taking bold action now can we ensure a future free of discrimination and violence against women and girls; a world that offers equal opportunities for all.

This year's theme, "Equal access to education, training and science and technology", is a fundamental one. Education is a basic human right; it is central to economic security and opportunity as well as sustainable development. Investing globally in girls' education spurs economic growth and political

participation. Literacy and numeracy equip women for economic independence, increasing their chances of achieving their full potential.

Women have played a crucial role in bringing about change in Northern Africa. Amidst violence, women have joined the struggle for change. We hope that the key role that women have played so far will be reflected fully in the institutional changes that are already under discussion in the region. Women must be at the heart of the discussions over the future order.

International Women's Day also reminds us that many women around the world continue to face inequality. They earn less and own less than men and they are still underrepresented politically and in the business world. Every day, thousands of women and girls are victims of gender-based violence, including sexual abuse, trafficking and early and forced marriage.

Today, the EU reaffirms its commitment to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Equality between women and men is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU and a necessary condition for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth within the EU as well as a key principle in its external actions.”