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Swedish Presidency of the European Union

**Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 1 October 2009**

EU Statement, Working Session 7: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II

Thank you, Mr/Ms Moderator

The EU attaches great importance to gender equality and full participation of women in all spheres of life, in particular in the decision making process, as this is paramount in achieving OSCE goals of comprehensive security.

For over 50 years, the goal of gender equality has been pursued within the EU. Since the 1990s the strategy of gender mainstreaming has been introduced and implemented in the EU activities. The Treaty of Maastricht of 1992 obliges States to promote equality between women and men. The current economic crisis highlights the importance of the economic aspect of gender equality: women must have the same rights and opportunities as men in order to support themselves and to gain economic independence. Several directives have been adopted to implement this principle, ensuring not only equal treatment in employment including equal pay for women and men for the same work; but also

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protective measures against direct and indirect discrimination. In this context the EU would like to pay tribute to the recent developments in the OSCE as during the 17th Economic and Environmental Forum held in Athens in May 2009 Guide on Gender-Sensitive Labor Migration Policies was launched. This was a joint initiative of the Co-ordinator of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and of the Gender Section of the Secretariat. This Guide can serve as an excellent source of inspiration to participating States to develop and implement more gender-sensitive policies in labor migration.

Already in 2004 OSCE participating States adopted the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, but it can be said that process of implementation has not been as swift as it could be. At the same time the system of annual reporting by the Secretary General about the implementation of the Action Plan lays a good basis for moving forward. Thorough, detailed and objective evaluation reports highlight the importance of the work done by the Gender Section of the Secretariat and show the necessity of a cohesive effort from the Secretariat, ODIHR and participating States. The EU would also like to refer to the recently published 2009 evaluation report which highlighted the importance of maintaining the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and related MC Decisions, among the Organisation's priorities.

Violence against women, including domestic and violence in conflict situations, unfortunately occurs in all participating States on a daily basis. Moreover, domestic violence tends to increase in times of economic hardship such as we experience at this point in time.

The EU welcomes the efforts of ODIHR and Gender Section of the Secretariat in initiating and supporting projects, seminars and awareness campaigns aiming at the prevention of violence against women. It should be noted that in June the Secretariat's Gender Section launched a compilation of good practices for combating violence against women. Taking concrete steps to turn obligations and commitments into real terms is vital and we encourage the Secretariat, Gender Equality Unit of ODIHR and participating States for continuing their activities in this important field.

The adoption of the EU guidelines on violence against women and girls in February 2009 demonstrates the EU's political will and commitment to keep the subject of women's rights on its agenda as a priority and to take long-term action in this field. In focusing on the issue of violence against women and girls, the EU will be taking effective action against one of the major impediment for women to fully enjoy their human rights in today's world within the framework of international organizations as well as through its human rights dialogue with third countries.

One of the topics that the EU would like to touch upon is gender equality within development cooperation. In recent years the EU has increased its efforts in order to pursue more effectively and coherently the gender equality objectives within the development cooperation. In 2005 with the European Consensus on Development, European Commission and Member States identified gender equality not only as its own right but also as one of the five common principles of EU development. Gender equality was also identified as a prerequisite to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals.

In 2007 the Commission Communication on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation and the related Council conclusions marked an important milestone in addressing gender issues in this context. The Commission Communication sets a frame for a better EU coordination, and fully supports the twin-track approach of increasing the efficiency of gender mainstreaming and refocusing specific actions for women's empowerment in all developing countries. The EU is following up the Council conclusions, and is currently developing a Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External action.

Closely connected with the development cooperation is post-conflict rehabilitation and crisis management. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) calls for increased involvement of women, at all decision-making levels, in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction. UNSCR 1325 clearly identifies women as important actors in peace-building and conflict mediation. In this context the EU would like to recall the Ministerial Council Decision in 2005 to implement the UNSCR 1325, "Women, Peace and Security" in all OSCE dimensions and of OSCE 2004 Action Plan. The EU would also like to refer to UNSC Resolution 1820 that is a landmark resolution and a vital complement to resolution 1325 on women peace and security.

The European Union has undertaken to promote the role of women in peace building and to enhance the implementation of UN Resolutions in its external actions in that area.

In conclusion I would like to reaffirm the EU's commitment to work closely with all OSCE Institutions and participating States in

achieving the goals laid down in 2004 Action Plan and enhancing gender equality dimensions of the OSCE goals of comprehensive and sustainable security.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

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