Mr Chair,

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

The Candidate Countries Turkey, 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, and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

Every day, women all over the world fight for equality, recognition and safety. These fights – taken up by mothers trying to raise healthy families, and young women who want access to higher education or better jobs, – are often invisible to the outside world. These daily battles are hard-fought; these victories are hard won, but are remembered and celebrated all over the world, among friends, at the market or in the workplace.

Women also come together collectively to make a difference on the global stage. In March, at the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, women from around the world came together here in New York to advocate as a group for their right to be equal and free from

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* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
violence. In the agreed outcome of the session, states, once again, committed themselves to practise the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and combat all forms of violence against women and girls.

We strongly condemn all forms of violence against women as violations of women's full enjoyment of human rights. Neither custom, tradition, culture, privacy, religion, nor so-called honour can be invoked to justify violence in any of its forms, or to diminish, limit or otherwise reduce the obligations of States with respect to the prevention and elimination of violence, and the effective prosecution of perpetrators.

The promotion of gender equality and the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls are EU objectives. We are guided by the principle articulated in the UN Charter — the principle of the equal rights of men and women. Gender equality is a fundamental right enshrined in the EU Treaty and guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU has put in place comprehensive policies aimed at ensuring women an equal role and full participation in political, economic and social life; an environment conducive to better reconciling family, professional and private life for both women and men, and to achieve equal and genuine economic independence. Only by eliminating the root causes of inequalities, including the unequal share of power between women and men, can we successfully fight violence against women and girls.

The commitment and responsibility of men and boys in this context is critical. We encourage them to play an active role in promoting gender equality and to speak out against violence against women.

Mr Chair,

We welcome the key role that UN Women has come to play in empowering women and eliminating violence against women and girls through its programmes, technical assistance, advocacy and normative work, and also through its leadership and coordination of efforts across the UN.

We look very much forward to cooperating with the new UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and support her in her work to protect and promote women's rights. When women are empowered, the benefits ripple outwards and bring gains to many others. Empowering women as economic, political and social actors can change policy choices, contribute to economic development and make institutions more representative of a range of voices.

The EU and UN Women have intensified cooperation through implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding aiming to foster policy dialogue and co-operation in several fields, including combating sexual and gender based violence, in line with the "EU Guidelines on
Violence Against Women and Girls and Combating All Forms of Discrimination Against Them" and "EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development 2010-2015”.

This Plan of Action helps guide the EU’s external action in this domain over the coming years and 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 the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination of Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Cairo Programme of Action.

The plan 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. We are fully committed to the effective implementation of one of the most ratified human rights conventions, the aforementioned Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and we urge all countries that have not yet done so to sign, ratify and fully implement the Convention and its Optional Protocol. We highly value the work of the CEDAW Committee in its work to advance and ensure the implementation of the Convention and to reduce the numerous reservations made.

The EU also aims to ensure that the role of women and their rights are safeguarded in periods of transition, as in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, but also in other parts of the world, like for example in Burma/Myanmar and the Great Lakes region of Africa. In the latter, we particularly salute the work of the UN Special Representative for the Great Lakes, Mary Robinson. Periods of transition provide a unique chance to promote the full participation of women in all decision-making processes. Their equal representation in constituent assemblies and transitional governments is of crucial importance to ensure that women’s rights and their particular concerns are taken into account in new legal and political structures.

Mr Chair,

Let me now turn to other areas where the EU is active on gender policies. Firstly, there are many humanitarian crisis situations taking place around the globe. Refugee and internally displaced women and girls - who constitute a significant part of refugee populations – are exposed to specific risks and increased vulnerability. As families struggle to cope with economic difficulties, the equal access of women and girls to many rights such as education and health are often at risk. Also, there are worrying reports of increasing levels of sexual violence and early marriages involving young girls escaping from conflict.

Humanitarian and refugee crises are not gender neutral - they have a different impact on women, girls, boys and men. The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid highlights the importance of integrating gender considerations, incorporating protection strategies and promoting the
participation of women. The EU is committed to strengthening gender-sensitive humanitarian assistance and has just finalised a gender policy for EU humanitarian aid. Secondly, with the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty earlier this year, we have reached a major milestone after years of work. In the EU, we have been staunch supporters of the process since its very first beginning. This Treaty contains clear and strong parameters which ensure that arms are transferred in respect of human rights and international humanitarian law. In this context, the recognition of the specific potential impacts of international arms transfers on women and their rights is a further step forward and an issue of major innovation.

For the first time in a legally binding international instrument regulating the international trade in conventional arms, a binding criterion on gender-based violence has been introduced.

Thirdly, women's economic empowerment and their full participation in economic life are crucial for development and improving the general quality of life globally, for both women and men. As stated in the World Development Report 2012 on 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. With women now representing 40 per cent of the global labour force and more than half the world’s university students, overall productivity will increase if their skills and talents are used fully.

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, as well as of the outcome of its review processes, which remain highly relevant and valuable normative instruments.

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.

Mr Chair,

The EU and its Member States are committed to promote the role of women in peace and security, through the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions. Protection of women in conflict situations against violence, including sexual violence, and ending impunity remain our utmost priorities. Around half of all EU Member States have adopted national action plans with the aim of strengthening their action on UNSCR 1325.
The EU supports the work of the new Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms Zainab Bangura and the work 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. In this regard, the EU is now working to establish a policy on Transitional Justice, which will contribute to implementing EU commitments to peace, security, the rule of law, ending impunity, and respect for fundamental human rights.

Given the continuing prevalence of sexual violence in conflict, more attention is required to end impunity and ingrained discrimination against women. The EU is very active in supporting the International Criminal Court, vulnerable Human Rights Defenders and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. We also supported the G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. To be successful, we need to build further alliances with other international partners and we commend the idea of establishing an even wider global coalition of international champions to prevent sexual violence in conflict. In this regard, we welcome the endorsement by over 100 states of the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in New York in September.

We are also strongly committed to the fight against Female Genital Mutilation, which constitutes a violation of human rights and of the rights of women and girls and causes severe short-and long-term physical and psychological consequences for the victims.

The EU and its Member States believe that the overarching post 2015 framework should ensure a rights-based approach encompassing all human rights. It should also address justice, equality and equity, good governance, democracy and the rule of law, with a strong focus on the empowerment and rights of women and girls and gender equality, and on preventing and combating violence against women as essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development, as well as important values and objectives in themselves. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment is an integral part of the Millennium Development Goals. It is in fact, a condition for achieving all the MDGs. However, while progress has been significant in the area of primary education, results in the field of economic and political empowerment are less encouraging. We still need to remove persistent barriers to women’s equal participation. In this regard, special attention needs to be paid to women and girls belonging to vulnerable groups and facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Mr Chair,
Let me end by quoting the Pulitzer Prize winning author and journalist Nicholas D. Kristof, who said:

“In the nineteenth century, the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world.”

The EU, with its policies, stands firmly behind that struggle and we will continue to work in cooperation with all our partners to make gender equality a reality for everyone.

Thank you.