



**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

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Statement delivered by

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### **General Discussion of the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

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Honourable Chair,

The Candidate Countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, as well as Andorra, Monaco align themselves with this statement.

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The EU welcomes the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women as an opportunity to achieve tangible progress. We cannot accept that 383 million women and girls around the world are experiencing extreme poverty. Many more are deprived, vulnerable or at risk of poverty in all its dimensions. This session takes place in troubling times. Crises, conflicts and war are exacerbating inequalities and poverty. Conflicts risk putting pressure on the financing available for poverty alleviation. The impacts of climate change are increasing poverty globally, disproportionately affecting women and girls.

The pursuit of peace and security, a human rights-based approach and gender-responsive measures to tackle poverty must be at the centre of our multilateral common agenda. We cannot achieve these objectives without the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls at all levels. The Summit of the Future and the Pact for the Future will be a critical opportunity to make these commitments a reality.

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Women and girls are disproportionately impacted, across societies all over the world, by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence and other human rights violations and abuses. This hampers the potential to eradicate the feminization of poverty and lift women and girls out of intergenerational cycles of poverty.

In this context, we must accelerate progress 26 times faster to reach SDG1 (no poverty) by 2030, which is especially off track when it comes to women and girls.

At this session, the CSW must build political will and spur commitments to effectively tackle poverty experienced by women and girls globally, including in fragile, crisis and conflict-affected areas. This includes tackling root causes such as gender-based violence and discrimination, inequality, gender stereotypes, and discriminatory social norms.

Women's and girls' empowerment and leadership are vitally important. The EU works towards women's and youth's full, equal and meaningful participation, in all their diversity, in all spheres of public and political life (as per the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024).

Women have a crucial role to play in sustainable development at large – as civil society actors, human rights defenders, mediators and peacebuilders.

Economic empowerment and economic independence for women and girls is a key factor in successfully eradicating all forms of poverty, as is quality and inclusive education. Examples of other critical measures include financial inclusion, closing the gender digital divide, decent work and equal pay, social protection, welfare, health services, and gender transformative climate action.

Women devote, on average, 3.2 times more time than men to unpaid care work, hampering their opportunities to earn equal levels of income, advance their careers and perpetuating cycles of poverty over their life-course. It is thus vital to support the equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, girls and boys, and within the household. Increasing access to affordable and quality social services, including care services, childcare, maternity, paternity and paid parental leave, improving working conditions and equal pay in the care sector are important policy drivers in this regard. The EU remains committed to these goals, not least through the European Care Strategy.

We cannot stress enough the interlinkages between fragility, crisis, conflicts, poverty, health and sexual and gender-based violence globally. The EU's financial commitment to preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence has averaged EUR 91 million per annum in recent years, going up to EUR 282 million in 2022. In addition, more than 40 million euro was spent annually in 2022-23 to tackle sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian responses.

The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Programme of Action on the International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education and health-care services.

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In order to respond to these pressing challenges, the EU calls for gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting to accelerate progress on gender equality and facilitate the implementation of gender-responsive policies and legislation. To succeed, we need men and boys as allies and as agents and beneficiaries of change. Gender equality should not be a polarizing factor: it must unite us.

While implementation relies on action at national and regional level, international cooperation and concerted efforts among all stakeholders are essential. This requires that we give voice and wider space to civil society, support feminist and women's rights organisations and women human rights defenders and mobilise financial resources to support them.

The EU, through its External Investment Plan, promotes women's entrepreneurship and labour market participation, not least through Team Europe initiatives in Africa and the EU

Neighbourhood region. The EU Global Gateway Investment Package prioritizes the full inclusion of women and girls in social and economic life, with focus on education and skills.

Moreover, global actors, including Development Financing Institutions, play a key role in advancing innovative finance for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. The European Investment Bank mainstreams gender equality and women's economic empowerment in green financing globally.

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Malala Yousafzai once said: 'we cannot all succeed when half of us are held back'. This reminds us that every government in this room must walk the talk, to ensure every woman and girl can fully enjoy their human rights, live in dignity, freedom and peace, and reach their fullest potential.

As we approach the 30th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and ICPD Programme of Action, it is high time to step up our efforts. The EU stands ready to do its part for a successful and ambitious outcome of this important Session. I thank you.