



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union to South Africa

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Press Release

.../ for immediate release

International Women's Day: action plan puts equality and empowerment high on the development agenda

Today, on the occasion of International Women's Day and of the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, the European Commission services have outlined an EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development for the period 2010-2015. This Action Plan aims to accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular on gender equality and maternal health, as well as to contribute to attaining other international development goals related to gender equality. The Action Plan suggests actions in areas, such as the organisation of regular political meetings to assess progress on the issue, the setting up of gender databases and analysis and a stronger involvement of civil society.

"Improving women's daily lives in the world will be one of my priorities", stated Andris Piebalgs, European Commissioner for Development. "The EU is the world's biggest donor, so we have to show leadership to put gender equality high on the political agenda. This is all the more urgent since the two Millennium Development Goals dedicated to women and maternal health are lagging behind the most. We have to enhance our ability to assist countries to implement their gender commitments and to support the efforts women's groups and networks in their fight for greater equality,"

The EU's Ambassador to South Africa, Lodewijk Briët, is unequivocal: "The struggle for gender equality is not alone a woman's struggle, nor for that matter a women's struggle against men – it is a societal struggle for equality and justice. It is a struggle for progress and human rights – no less."

15 years after the Beijing Declaration and on the eve of the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration, the objective of gender equality in partner countries is still a distant prospect. The goal of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (MDG 3) is lagging behind in many countries, although the world continues to see progress on gender parity in education. The same can be said for the participation of women in politics, which while increasing in some regions, is largely absent or stagnant in others. On the improvement of maternal health (MDG 5), a more pessimistic picture emerges as this goal has made the least progress out of all MDGs. Every year half a million women and girls die from pregnancy-related causes. Acts of gender-based violence continue to be widespread worldwide, particularly against women and girls.

In light of this situation, and building on the current policy framework set in the 2007 Communication on Gender Equality and related Council Conclusions, the new EU Gender Action Plan calls for a three-fold approach that combines political and policy dialogue, gender mainstreaming, and specific actions for specific cases.

It also aims to reinforce EU coordination regarding gender equality policies and actions in development in the interest of having more of an impact on the ground.

The EU is constantly promoting women's rights in its cooperation with governments and civil society, both in its political dialogues as well as in its concrete cooperation on the ground. The scope of its action is vast including a system of micro-credits for women in Morocco, support of rape victims in Botswana, empowerment of women in conflict zones in the Middle East.

More info:

EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm

Europe for Women

http://ec.europa.eu/publications/booklets/others/87/index_en.htm



International drawing competition: in order to raise awareness with a concrete action targeting a younger public in the developing world, the European Commission is, for the fourth year in a row, organising an international drawing competition on gender equality. Eight to ten year old children from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, the Pacific, Latin America, Mediterranean, the Middle East and other European Countries, including the EU's Eastern Neighbours are invited to show their vision of gender equality. This year's theme proposes to reflect on how girls and boys, women and men, together can make the world a better place. The winners in each region will be awarded a prize of €1,000 each, which can be used to buy books, computers or other education materials. Since the first edition of the competition in 2007, almost 60,000 children all over the world have contributed to the dialogue on gender equality at home and at school, while national and local authorities, as well as civil society, have often been closely involved.

International Competition on Gender Equality

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/gender/drawing-competition_en.htm

See also: Success stories of EU-funded projects:

Women Against Rape, Botswana

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/case-studies/botswana_gender_war_en.pdf

Campaign for the eradication of violence against women and human trafficking in the state of Tlaxcala, Mexico

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/case-studies/mexico_tlaxcala_en.pdf

Regional initiative for the equality of women in employment in Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/case-studies/latin-america_gender-equality_en.pdf