



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union to South Africa

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Press Release

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International Women's Day – 8 March 2010

Fifteen years after the groundbreaking Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing in 1995, the international community has clear legal norms on the prohibition of discrimination and the active promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. These norms are accepted in all countries of the world as part of human rights law. The international community is also equipped with bodies that can effectively monitor the implementation of women's rights. This is the case of the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (the 'CEDAW Committee') and the recently-established Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on violence against women in conflict situations.

However, implementation is slow in many countries of the world. From a new 10-country study on women's health and domestic violence conducted by the World Health Organisation, it appears that between 15% and 71% of women reported physical or sexual violence by a husband or partner. Between 4% and 12% of women reported being physically abused during pregnancy. Every year, about 5,000 women are murdered by family members in the name of honour each year worldwide. Under these conditions, women's rights mechanisms remain under-exploited, and the possibility for individual victims to submit complaints to the UN, for example, is unknown to most women. These are key challenges for the EU human rights policy in third countries. In Brussels the EU is doing its part, holding itself to the highest standards. Tomorrow the Council of the EU is adopting conclusions on 'Eradication of Violence Against Women in the European Union'. The EU must also lead by example in our internal policies.

On the eve of the International Women's Day, Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission said:

"International Women's Day provides a great opportunity for each one of us to reflect on our responsibility for working towards the eradication of gender inequality. This is very much true also in international relations, where all must play their part in reaching this common goal. Sustainable peace and security cannot be achieved without the full participation of women.

Unfortunately, the persistence of constitutions and laws that blatantly discriminate against women still undermines the development of countries around the world. Violence against women has direct negative consequences on women's access to education, job and on to their participation in the public life. The impact of the marginalisation of women is not only at the expense of women, but runs counter to the overall empowerment of local communities. There remains a huge amount to do in all parts of the world."

"This is a global challenge of the highest order, to deliver gender Equality and empower women, within Europe and beyond. That is why the EU will continue to put pro-active work in this field at the heart of our policies, both internal and external. Heads of EU Delegations throughout the world have just received clear instructions in this respect", she added."

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