



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Commission to South Africa

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Press Release

Women's Day: Europe keeps women's empowerment high on its global agenda

On the occasion of the International Women's Day on 8 March, which this year carries the theme 'Women and men united to end violence against women and girls', Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner reaffirms the Commission's continuing political and financial commitment to fight for women rights. Empowerment of women is a topic which continues to be high on the EU's global agenda. In 2008, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner led an initiative of 40 world women leaders from politics, business and civil society that called for a new momentum in the effective implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Following their recommendation, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has agreed to convene a Ministerial Conference in 2010 to take stock of progress achieved and to examine ways to further enhance the impact of Resolution 1325. Also on the occasion of the International Women's Day, the European Commission launches, under the patronage of Princess Mathilde of Belgium, an international drawing competition for children on gender equality which calls upon children from third countries to express their vision of gender equality. So far almost 60,000 children, aged 8 to 10, from 61 countries from all corners of the globe have participated in the competition.

On the occasion of International Women's day Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy said: *"I am well aware that the full empowerment of women is still a distant call for many women around the world. Therefore, I remain strongly committed to maintaining our steady level of engagement and to ensuring that we keep our promises of fully mobilising our policy and financial tools to enhance UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security. We cannot step down our game until each and every woman's rights are respected and protected throughout the world. Furthermore, we need to invest in the future by involving children in the process and raising their awareness on gender equality issues."* She added: *"The "International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership, Development, International Peace and Security", currently taking place in Monrovia is an important event for the empowerment of women and I wish it every success."*

Speaking in particular on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner stated: *"I full heartedly welcome the UN Secretary General's agreement on the need to call for a follow up Conference on Resolution 1325. In the 10 years since the adoption of the UN Resolution, we have seen some progress in its implementation – such as the involvement of women in the Juba talks over northern Uganda or the participation of women groups in the peace-negotiations in Colombia, Nepal or Sri Lanka. However, enormous challenges remain as the implementation of the Resolution 1325 has unfortunately often been inconsistent and insufficient."*

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security plays an important role as it was the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council specifically addressing the impact of war on women, and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. Upon the invitation of Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner on 6 March 2008 more than 40 international women leaders met in Brussels to discuss the twin themes of security and women's empowerment. The conference debated how women's talents can be deployed better in order to contribute to human security, and in particular, conflict prevention and resolution. Participants agreed to work towards a strengthened dialogue with those governments and leaders sceptical of the need to enhance women empowerment. After the conference, participants called upon UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to renew the momentum for the effective implementation of Resolution 1325 and to convene a Ministerial conference in 2010, marking the tenth anniversary of the resolution and to take stock of progress achieved as well as examine ways to further enhance the concrete impact of resolution 1325.

The European Union is committed to discussing gender equality issues with its partner countries and to mainstreaming gender issues in all its external actions. Annually almost 35% of the European Commission's development aid is spent on projects that have a significant gender dimension.

The eradication of gender-based violence is a specific priority of the European Union's human rights policy in third countries, as reflected in the adoption in December 2008 of new "EU Guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls and Combating all Forms of Discrimination against Them". Along with these Guidelines, for instance, the European Union is determined to urge third countries to enhance the fight against impunity and to support the protection and reintegration of victims, in close cooperation with civil society organisations and with women human rights defenders. This includes protection against harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation.

More recently, the work of the Union in this area is guided by the "EU Comprehensive Approach for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace and Security". This new policy document, which was adopted by EU Ministers for Foreign Affairs on 8 December 2008, presents a vision of the role and obligations of a regional actor such as the EU in protecting women in conflict situations and in facilitating their pro-active role as peace-builders.

For the third year in a row, on 8th March 2009 the European Commission launches an international drawing competition on the gender equality theme. This competition calls upon children in third countries to express their vision of gender equality. Two drawings per region will be selected by a jury composed of children from the 27 EU Member states based in Brussels and a prize of €1,000 will be awarded to each winner. The exhibition will subsequently be inaugurated in the autumn 2009.

When handing over last year's prizes Benita Ferrero-Waldner said: *"Our objective is that women's rights shall be respected and protected throughout the world. Involving children from all around the world in the process and raising their awareness on gender equality is to invest in the future."*

For further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/intro/index.htm

<http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/gender>

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

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/ferrero-waldner/women_en.htm

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