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30th years of UN Women's Rights Convention: the EU underlines the power of human rights to eradicate gender-based discrimination

The 30th anniversary of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides a great opportunity to reflect about the world's situation of women's rights. In spite of progress in the promotion of gender equality, discriminations on the basis of gender are still pervasive in all societies. Gender equality is a chapter of close co-operation between the European Union and international and regional organisations. In particular, the European Union engages with partner countries to combat the practice of discriminatory laws. Through its financial instruments, the EU supports complementary efforts by civil society organisations, such as activities on advocacy, monitoring and support to victims.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, said: "This Convention has now been ratified by almost all countries in the world and in many has guided the review of constitutions or other national legislations, which now enshrine the principle of gender equality. However, much more still needs to be done. What is of pressing concern is that states that have ratified the Convention continue to maintain legislation that discriminates against women, in areas such as inheritance rights, the transmission of nationality by women or the right to property. The EU will continue to engage with partner countries and organisations on these critical issues."

Background

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly 30 years ago, on 18 December 1979. In 2009, we are also celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. To date, 186 countries have ratified the Convention and 98 of these countries have ratified the Optional Protocol.

Information about the implementation of CEDAW, such as that provided by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discriminations against Women, forms the basis for a frank and constructive dialogue between the EU and its partner countries. A recent example of discussions at the ministerial level on strengthening the role of women in society is the conference that was organised in Marrakesh last 11-12 November in the framework of the Union for Mediterranean. Last 25 September, the European Union, the African Union and the United Nations organised in New York a high-level breakfast meeting on efforts of regional organisations to implement UN Security Council resolution 1325(2000) on women, peace and security. These discussions took place in the run up to the adoption by the UN Security Council of two new resolutions on women, peace and security (resolutions 1888 and 1889), which significantly contribute to strengthening international accountability on sexual violence against women.

The holding of systematic discussions about women's rights between the EU and partner countries is a key deliverable of the "EU Guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls and combating all Forms of Discrimination against Them". As part of the implementation of these Guidelines, the EU supports a number of activities of civil society organisations in monitoring the implementation and raising awareness about CEDAW, in particular through the "European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights". In addition, through the thematic programme "Investing in People", the Commission has recently launched a call for proposals on strengthening the capacity of non-State actors to promote women's rights and gender equality in the Mediterranean countries, with a deadline for the submission of proposals on 8 February 2010.

For further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/women/index_en.htm

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