



**Meeting of the General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals  
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**"Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women's empowerment"**

**Speaking points on behalf of the European Union and its Member States  
delivered by  
Mr. Andris Piebalgs  
European Commissioner for Development**

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

The Millennium Declaration enshrined the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level and set out equality of opportunity to benefit from development and equality of rights between women and men as fundamental values of the international community. However, more than a decade later a wide set of inequalities, including income and wealth disparities, as well as non-economic inequalities remain in large measure unsolved. This affects people in high, middle and low income countries, and both present and future generations. Therefore, **addressing inequalities has emerged as a universal concern** in the design of the post-2015 framework.

Inequality has many dimensions. It can be reflected in income, assets, access to food and nutrition, life expectancy, educational attainments, access to quality social services, living and working conditions, decent work opportunities, participation in decision making, and exposure to environmental hazards. All of these are mutually reinforcing and constitute a **barrier to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, harm social development and have the potential to fuel tension and political conflict**.

The failure to reduce inequalities is **holding back progress** towards the Millennium Development Goals, with certain population groups persistently excluded from progress on goals such as those related to poverty reduction, gender equality, education and health. Globally a large number of people belong to groups that experience discrimination or disadvantages based on grounds including sex, race, ethnic or social origin, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Therefore the post-2015 framework should ensure a rights-based approach encompassing all **human rights** and be based on the principles of justice, equality, equity, democracy, good governance and the rule of law.

The EU and its Member States emphasize the need for sustainable economic growth that addresses the needs for employment, social inclusion and environmental protection in mutually reinforcing ways. In this context, we would like to emphasise the following points:

1. A future framework must have the ambition of halting, and indeed reversing, the existing trends of **increasing income and other inequalities**, and must acknowledge that tackling inequalities, marginalization and discrimination is indispensable for effective poverty eradication and sustainable development. A post-2015 agenda should fully reflect the vision of the High-level Panel to **leave no-one behind**.

2. The benefits of sustainable growth and development must be shared by all members of society. If we want to progress towards more equal societies we need to promote **inclusive economic growth** for women and men underpinned by more effective institutions, including mechanisms for equitable redistribution, and by good governance. We need a broad, job-centred sustainable development agenda characterised by productive and decent job creation, equitable distribution of economic opportunities, and universal access to basic social services, such as health and education services, which are important preconditions for social and economic inclusion, and full participation in society. Monitoring of disparities will require further disaggregation of data by income, sex, disability, age, location, as well as different ethnic and other social groups.

3. **Social protection**, which lies at the heart of the European social model, is an investment in human development and inclusive sustainable economic growth. It is key to reducing inequalities and ensuring that those beneficiaries who can are enabled to participate in productive economic activity and employment. Social protection, by providing income security and universal and non-discriminatory access to social services, contributes to tackling inequalities, reducing poverty and to a better management of risks and economic and life-cycle shocks.

4. Addressing inequality must also be seen in the broader context of ensuring sustainable prosperity for all within **planetary boundaries**. More than 70% of the world's poor - including the majority of the most marginalised people - live in rural and coastal areas and depend directly on ecosystems services for their livelihoods. Development strategies which fail to protect the environment undermine our efforts to reduce poverty and thus contribute to increasing inequality. Preserving our shared natural resources for present and future generations is also a matter of intergenerational equity. In this regard there is a need to manage our consumption and production patterns in more sustainable and equitable ways.

We believe that promoting gender equality and women's and girl's rights is a crucial part of the "**unfinished business**" of the MDGs and key to accelerating global sustainable development beyond 2015. We call for a **strong focus on the empowerment and rights of women and girls and gender equality**, and the prevention and combating of violence against women and girls as essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development, as well as important values and objectives in themselves since the human rights of women and girls are an inalienable and indivisible part of universal human rights.

The EU and its Member States remain committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context **sexual and reproductive health and rights**.

For these reasons the EU considers gender equality and **women's and girl's rights and empowerment as a universal priority** for the post-2015 development agenda. The post-2015 framework provides us a unique opportunity to complete the "unfinished business" but also to tackle the structural causes of gender inequality in a more comprehensive and transformative way. This

means addressing the many dimensions of gender-based discrimination, including multiple discrimination women and girls also suffer as indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, migrants or because they belong to a minority groups.

Therefore, we call for gender equality and women's empowerment to be considered as a priority in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda and for the integration of a gender perspective into the new development framework.

The following themes need to be emphasised in a post-2015 framework:

1. **Women's and girls' economic and social empowerment is central to gender equality and economic development.** We need to undertake concrete actions to promote women's access to decent and productive employment, to close all gender gaps in the labour market, including in pay, to recognise women's unpaid care work and to promote measures to reconcile work and private life and the equal sharing of care responsibilities with men, to remove legal and policy barriers to women's and girl's economic opportunities and property rights. We must ensure equal access to, and control over, productive resources, education, family planning and health care and other social services, including access to maternal/parental leave and child care facilities.

2. We need to **eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls**, combining legislative and non-legislative measures, and addressing the root causes of violence. This includes the protection and support to victims and survivors, universal and free access to essential services and to the justice system and the prosecution of perpetrators in order to end impunity and ensure accountability. At the same time we need to transform discriminatory social norms, end child, early and forced marriage, and stop female genital mutilation. We must not forget the critical role and responsibility of men and boys in this process.

3. We need to **promote women's equal participation and representation in decision making processes** at all levels, in all spheres, and eliminate all forms of discrimination.

Against this background we consider the issues discussed today as universal challenges for the post-2015 era, and remain committed to engaging in further discussions on how the post-2015 framework can tackle them.