

EPF DELEGATION VISIT

TO THE

54th SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF WOMEN

01 - 05 MARCH 2010, NEW YORK

*** DELEGATION REPORT ***



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I. Introduction and Background

From 01 – 05 March 2010, the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF) brought an eleven-member strong parliamentary delegation to the 54th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW).

Members of the Delegation included:

- Hon. Petra Bayr, MP (Austria/Social Democratic Party)
- Hon. Azra Alajbegovic, MP (Bosnia & Herzegovina/Party for Bosnia & Herzegovina)
- Hon. Miapretra Kumpula-Natri, MP (Finland/Social Democratic Party)
- Hon. Sirpa Pietikäinen, MEP (Finland/European Parliament/European People's Party)
- Hon. Danielle Bousquet, MP (France/Socialist Party)
- Senator Fiona O'Malley (Ireland/Irish Progressive Democrats)
- Senator Tudor Udristoiu (Romania/Democratic Liberal Party)
- Hon. Laia Ortiz Castellvi, MP (Spain/Catalonia/The Initiative for Catalonia Greens)
- Hon. Öznur Çalik, MP (Turkey/Justice and Development Party)
- Hon. Sacid Yildiz, MP (Turkey/Republican Peoples Party)
- Hon. Christine McCafferty, MP (UK/Labour Party)

The 2010 EPF delegation visit focussed on the "Future of Women at the UN". This topic was chosen in light of the fundamental developments at UN level with regard to women's representation, most notably, the establishment of a consolidated women's entity. The visit was conducted in the framework of EPF's Parliamentary Taskforce dedicated to the UN which was launched at the beginning of 2008. It focuses on supporting Parliamentary involvement in UN decision-making with a view to ensure that a Parliamentary perspective supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is heard in relevant UN settings. This year's CSW meeting provided such an opportunity as it undertook a fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000). This provided an important occasion to evaluate the progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), to discuss the remaining challenges and to design an ambitious way forward to realize full empowerment of women and gender equality worldwide.

II. The purpose of this delegation visit was:

- To educate and raise awareness amongst delegation members on how gender equality, women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights issues are dealt with at United Nations (UN) level;
- To familiarise delegation members with UN structures and working methods, especially within the framework of population and development issues;
- For delegation members to learn about the challenges and constraints International Organisations (IOs), NGOs and Civil Society Organisations as well as governments face when trying to forge consensus on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues at UN level;
- To receive first-hand information about the latest developments and initiatives the above mentioned actors initiated with regard to population and development policies;
- To receive first-hand information about the progress as well as the persisting gaps and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;
- To confront Delegation Members with the reality of UN negotiation processes and the difficulty to introduce and adopt strong and forward looking language on reproductive health, family planning, women's rights and gender equality.
- To ensure Delegation Members receive expert information from main players and key stakeholders on SRHR related topics and initiatives such as the UN Gender Entity, violence against women, the role of the Vatican at the UN, the health, rights and future of adolescent girls in development countries, the EU Delegation's role in consolidating EU Members' views on sexual and reproductive health matters, changes in EU representation

at the UN resulting from the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon as well as the upcoming UN high level meeting on the MDGs in September 2010.

III. Results and Lessons Learnt

- Participants agreed that the delegation visit contributed to a heightened awareness and understanding of the complex UN system and the topics that are under review with regard to SRHR, women's rights, gender equality as well as population and development issues in general. The visit also contributed to understand the urgent need to start enlarging the parliamentary presence during relevant UN meetings;
- Contact to national delegations and Ministers considerably improved the flow of information and cooperation between MPs and delegation members and helped to introduce and adopt stronger language in the UN CSW Resolution on "Eliminating Maternal Mortality and Morbidity through the Empowerment of Women";
- Delegates were sensitised about the considerable efforts of anti-choice groups and member-states opposed to reproductive health and family planning to weaken CSW Resolutions on maternal mortality and reproductive health and rights;
- Better activation of communication channels between MPs (who are not represented during UN Commission meetings unless they are part of their government's delegation or members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union) and government officials may be beneficial to achieve a stronger outcome document and help to shape national policies and priorities with regard to SRHR;
- It was considered essential to ensure that concerted parliamentary efforts are made to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights at UN level and in developing countries, especially with the upcoming UN high level meeting on the MDGs in September 2010;
- The delegation visit has contributed to a clearer understanding about the role Europe and especially the European Union (EU) plays as an actor and as a leader in population and development issues but also about the difficulties the EU faces amongst its members to speak with a coherent voice;
- The dual approach of participating in the official agenda of the UN CSW combined with expert briefings on relevant thematic issues helped Parliamentarians to grasp the many facets, forms and views the advancement of SRHR and gender equality on the political agenda may take.

IV. Delegation Meetings and Briefings

Next to the participation in the official programme of the UN CSW, EPF arranged a number of side meetings with relevant stakeholders and SRHR decision-makers in New York. EPF Delegates benefited from briefings with major actors and prominent voices in the SRHR field. These included representatives of UN Agencies, Funds and Programs



such as Ms Safiye Cagar, Director IERD, UNFPA and Ms Thea Fierens, Director of the Division for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA, Ms Rebeca Grynspan, UNDP Associate Administrator and Under Secretary-General (USG), and Ms Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Director, Democratic Governance Group, UNDP as well as Ms Gro Lindstad, Chief, Intergovernmental Relations, UNIFEM. EPF Delegates also had the chance to meet the UN Deputy Secretary-General Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the acting Head of the EU Delegation to the UN, Pedro Serrano as well as US-based SRHR advocacy and research partners such as the Population Council, Catholics for Choice, Women Deliver, the Guttmacher Institute, the IPPF Western Hemisphere Region and V-Day.



VI. Meeting outcomes and findings

The role of Parliamentarians in advancing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

In 1995, representatives from more than 180 countries adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action during the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing - the global community's most comprehensive policy document for the empowerment of women and gender equality. The overriding message of the Conference was that the issues addressed in the Platform for Action are global and universal. In twelve critical areas of concern¹, the Platform highlights women's rights and gives concrete and detailed recommendations for action.

It is important to note that the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and its Programme for Action, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reinforce each other and converge in their affirmation of women's human rights and the recognition that solving the world's most pressing problems demands the full participation and empowerment of the world's women and that further work is needed to translate this awareness into concrete action.

Recent evidence demonstrates that progress for women and girls under the Goals, as well as overall progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, has been very uneven and has produced inadequate results, including in areas such as poverty reduction, provision of full employment and decent work, education, including literacy, and maternal health.

During the various meetings, the following recommendations on how to advance the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action concretely, and which role Parliamentarians need to play were addressed:

- Ms Safiye Çagar, Director, IERD, UNFPA which is the UN Agency providing the main support for parliamentary advocacy worldwide, outlined that Parliamentarians have an essential role to play in rallying support for the ICPD Program of Action² and the Beijing Platform for Action, above all in times of economic crisis. Especially with an opposition that is not in favour of advancing women's sexual and reproductive health and rights gaining ground in Europe, it is necessary to keep championing SRHR and build new constituencies. In addition, it is of vital importance to ensure that political will and financial resources are available to prevent compromising on progress that has been made so far.
- It will be equally essential to reinforce the centrality of SRHR in the development agenda which implies that a holistic approach in advancing family programmes alongside with access to services, and the efforts to reduce maternal mortality must be pursued to address various needs within a population.
- With the set-up of new agencies and programmes such as the new UN gender entity, the funding situation becomes more challenging and donor countries face multiple priorities. This necessitates an even greater need for collaboration in partnership to ensure women's reproductive health and rights are guarded and women's voices are heard at UN level and beyond.
- Ms Çagar also elaborated on the fact that the EU used to represent a very strong block at the UN with regard to sexual and reproductive health and rights but that this strength has faded somewhat following EU enlargement in 2004 which has made the EU more heterogeneous. Therefore, it is all the more important that Parliamentarians convince their governments to speak with a strong voice at UN level.
- Being successful in this endeavour necessitates that women's rights are also considered in other political areas and fields, such as budget and economic policies. This "mainstreaming" not only of women's rights and gender equality but of population and

¹ The 12 critical areas of concern are: women and poverty, education and training, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl child.

² The Programme of Action adopted in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development (in short: ICPD Programme of Action) is a 20 year programme that, for the first time, moved population policy and programs away from a focus of human numbers to a focus on human lives. The Program of Action underscores the integral and mutually reinforcing linkages between population and development and urges the empowerment of women both as a highly important end in itself and as a key to improving the quality of life for everyone.

development issues in general guarantees a holistic approach to the topic and raises awareness on a broader basis.

- Using “windows of opportunities” in politics such as this year’s UN High Level Meeting on the MDGs in September, the Women Deliver Conference in June or the World AIDS Conference in July offer excellent opportunities to pursue a strong and dedicated line on the health-related MDGs at the highest level.
- In addition, there is the urgent need to consolidate and combine efforts to sharpen decision-makers awareness around maternal health and women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights at various levels by ensuring that MPs in various portfolio committees network on common approaches, that these Parliamentarians request accountability on the commitments made by their governments on the above-mentioned issues on a regular basis (ie. by issuing Parliamentary Questions).
- Finally, Ms Çagar emphasised that too often, disparities occur between political and financial commitments made by governments at international conferences and what is de facto allocated and implemented.

MDG 5 and SRHR at UN level

During their stay in New York, Delegation Members had the chance to touch upon the importance of maternal mortality (MDG5) as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights presented from various angles and of various regions of the world. Below is a summary of the most important findings and messages:

Ms Thea Fierens, Director of the UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (EECA RO) highlighted the situation in this region with regard to sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and maternal mortality. She emphasised that Eastern Europe and Central Asia is a forgotten region and often falls off the political radar despite pressing problems and challenges. 2 million people are falling back into poverty in Asia every year and many of the former gains are lost. Issues such as migration, ethnic minorities and a number of vulnerable groups were identified as main challenges in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The Russian Federation and Ukraine face an ever growing HIV pandemic that has an impact on the region as a whole. Abortion has often been regarded as a method of family planning in this part of the world and the use of contraceptives is still very low. Increased migration after the cold war led to a shift in age structure in these countries with not enough young people left to care for the elderly and to sustain a strong middle class. Ms Fierens also highlighted that even if good legislation is in place on violence against women in Central Asia, domestic violence remains a huge problem and is also culturally rooted. Since the UN is phasing out in the Russian Federation, Bulgaria and Romania, it is all the more important that an eye is kept on the above-mentioned developments in these countries. Finally, Ms Fierens encouraged Delegates to not lose sight on women’s rights, maternal health and women’s empowerment and to ensure that Eastern Europe and Central Asia remains on the radar of decision-makers.

Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, UN Deputy Secretary-General emphasised the centrality of MDG 5 since it relates to all other MDGs. One critical area that needs to be better supported and where Parliamentarians play a key role is in the advancement of policies on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Another focus has to be put on investing in health systems where reproductive health and family planning programs need to be at the centre of attention. Parliamentarians also play a key role in holding governments accountable in investing in women and to forge cooperation with other governments. Dr. Migiro elaborated on the key role the UN plays in building capacity in developing countries for them to develop and enforce legislation on SRHR, HIV/AIDS and maternal health. Helping countries to mobilise their own resources through economic empowerment, especially of women, is one of the key priorities for the UN Secretary-General. Dr. Migiro emphasised that current aid levels need to be kept since reductions in ODA directly affects women’s and children’s health and reverts efforts that have been made in this area.





During the meeting with the IPPF Western Hemisphere Region (WHR), Maria Antonieta Alcalde, Deputy Director of Public Affairs, highlighted that the Latin American Region is on the bottom of the list for SRHR funding and even the Obama Administration although very strong on reproductive health and family planning does not consider the Latin American Region as one of their priorities. IPPF WHR works to bring services to the poorest people in this region and co-operates with partners on the ground to create a better political, financial and legal environment on reproductive health and rights. One of the biggest challenges IPPF WHR faces in meaningfully advancing reproductive health and rights is conservatism and the influence of the Catholic Church especially at political level in Latin America. One strategy that IPPF WHR pursues in this regard is not to open spaces for the Catholic Church to intervene. This means that when talking to policy makers, lawyers and other stakeholders the Catholic Church is not included. Especially the weak civil society in most Latin American countries provides a fertile playing ground for the Catholic Church to advance. This is why youth programs that provide comprehensive sexuality education are so important, especially when realising that the only four countries worldwide in which abortion is completely forbidden, even if the mother's or child's life is at stake are located in Latin America (Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic).

Meeting with the UN Development Programme Representatives Rebeca Grynspan, UNDP Associate Administrator and Under Secretary-General as well as Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Practice Director, Democratic Governance Group, enabled Delegates to learn more about UNDPs work on Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment. UNDPs work is driven by a gender equality strategy. The Programme focuses on four areas: poverty reduction (MDG 1), democratic governance, crisis prevention & recovery, environment and energy. Focussing on women's political participation, Ms Grynspan highlighted that this is bound to two preconditions: the right legislation and the right assistance that teaches women how to become politically active. UNDP also plays an important part in the early recovery phases after a country has experienced crisis or conflict. Gender is a key point in re-building countries and societies. In the case of Uganda, i.e. the drafting of the constitution was used to build in quotas for women's participation in politics. UNDP also works on legal empowerment of the poor and upholds local ownership which was especially important in Haiti where UNDP staff learned a lot from dialogue on the ground and what response citizens would need. This resulted in starting the early recovery phase and humanitarian aid in parallel. In addition, UNFPA and WHO provided emergency care for women (in Haiti 7000 women delivered per month) and UNDP worked on safe settlements for women and children.

SRHR Research Meetings

A novelty during this year's delegation visit was the inclusion of major research institutes in the list of briefing meetings. This added component focussing on the neglected topic of "Investing in Vulnerable Adolescent Girls" presented by the Population Council and the presentation of the joint Guttmacher Institute/UNFPA study "Adding it Up - the costs and benefits of investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health" by representatives of the renowned Guttmacher Institute provided Delegates with powerful evidence-based data, best practices and concrete numbers, figures and arguments to pursue a stronger stance on the issues via governments and other decision-makers.

Confronting Delegation Members with the health, economic and societal situation of adolescent girls, Peter J. Donaldson, President of the Population Council and his team made a strong case on why investment in these adolescent girls is indispensable for building a strong economic base in development countries and why it entails huge economic benefits. He outlined that 14 million girls aged 14-19 give birth in developing countries each year. 70.000 girls die each year from pregnancy related complications which makes it the leading cause of death among girls in this age group. In addition, poor girls, especially in rural areas, are hard to reach, are often forced to marry at very young ages and are vulnerable to HIV, sexual violence and early pregnancy. As little as half a dollar per capita is currently invested in adolescent girls even though they are a critical assets to their communities. Studies show that women and girls, when they earn income, reinvest 90% of it within their families, compared to only 30% – 40% for men. Delegates were also learned about success stories in country such as Ethiopia, Kenya or South Africa, where girl's spaces have been created, own identity cards for girls were introduced to provide girls with a degree of social protection and wellness checkups for girls in clinics were included in programs.

Dr. Sharon Camp, President and CEO of the Guttmacher Institute and Dr. Susheela Singh, Vice-President for Research presented the most important findings of the “Adding it Up” Study to Delegates. The presentation convincingly showed that increasing investments in family planning and maternal and newborn health by a little more than double the current spending (by 12.8 bn USD to reach 24.6 bn USD) would prevent 53 million unintended pregnancies, 390.000 maternal deaths and 1.6 million newborn deaths. In addition, these investments would be cost-effective since investments previously needed to provide maternal and newborn care for unintended pregnancies would be reduced by 5.1 bn USD.

The UN Gender Entity

The planned establishment of the UN Gender Entity was one of the priority topics during the EPF Delegation visit. Gro Lindstadt, Chief, Intergovernmental Relations at UNIFEM elaborated on the details of the planned entity:



- The Gender Entity process started with the High Level Meeting on UN Reform in 2006 where external actors demanded the UN to start working on a gender equality and a women’s empowerment framework that would be stronger and more efficient than the existing one.
- The planned gender entity will consolidate the mandates of the four existing UN bodies dealing with gender equality and women’s rights (the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). It will be headed by an Under Secretary-General who, according to Ms Lindstad, needs to be strong politically and a strong administrator to keep Member States focussed.
- The Gender Entity will be created as part of the system-wide coherence efforts of the UN to further strengthen the management and coordination of UN operational activities and their effectiveness.
- Although the G77³ and especially Russia has voiced reservation to move forward on the entity, a result on its definite establishment is expected in form of a UN General Assembly Resolution in September this year.
- Currently, ongoing discussions concern the structure, funding and mandate of the entity. It has not yet been decided whether the entity will be established as a programme, an entity or an office, with the latter being the least favourable solution in terms of standing within the UN system.
- With regard to funding, Ms Lindstadt explained that the bulk of funding should be given as voluntary contributions by UN members since this would allow shifting money according to the needs of the agency rather than allocating it under the UN Budget which necessitates internal approval before the money can be used.
- UNIFEM as such will cease to exist once the new entity is set up but since 95% of UNIFEM staff and programs will be taken up within the new structure, the programme and content work will remain the same but under a different name.
- Asked if it has already been decided who would head the new entity, Ms Lindstad informed Delegates that letters will be sent out to all UN Member States and CSOs to suggest suitable candidates for the position. A short list of candidates will be assembled and interviews will then be held in co-operation with UN Member States.

³ The Group of 77 is the largest intergovernmental organization of developing states in the UN, which provides the means for the countries of the South to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues within the United Nations system, and promote South-South cooperation for development.

The EU Member States' and European countries' position on SRHR at UN level

One aim of the delegation visit was to gain a better understanding about the position of EU Member States on SRHR, gender equality and maternal health and the work of the EU Delegation in New York in ensuring that the EU as one of the major players within the UN speaks with one voice.

In recent years, the European Union has failed to do so during CSW meetings – especially because consensus is required amongst EU Member States to push forward a strong European voice. This lack of consensus was principally caused by Malta that, also this year, split the EU by refusing to accept the wording “reproductive rights” in the Maternal Mortality Resolution. How important it is to stay united especially on sensitive issues such as SRHR shows a comment by one of the EU Delegation Representatives stating that “if we unite, we represent 40 countries”.

Mr Pedro Serrano, Acting Head of the EU Delegation to the UN confirmed that it has been most difficult to find common language for the Resolution on “Eliminating Maternal Mortality and Morbidity through the Empowerment of Women”. This is why the main aim of the EC Delegation in New York is to shape consistency between different policies at Member State level and in Europe in general following a case-by-case approach. A challenge to reach consensus on SRHR issues is the diversity within the EU that reaches from more progressive (Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, UK etc.) to very conservative Members (Malta, Poland, Ireland). As a result of this internal division, it is often the case that EU Member States are forced to speak individually and in past years many countries advanced language on SRHR. Such countries included Austria, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and Denmark. Outside of the EU, Canada, Mexico, Switzerland and Norway pushed for strong language.

With regard to Gender Equality, Belinda Pyke, Director for Equality between Men and Women in the European Commission informed Delegates that the Commission intends to follow up on the outcomes on this year’s CSW with the new College of Commissioners and is committed to ensure that gender equality features strongly in EU policies. Currently, the EU Commission works on a new Roadmap on Gender Equality that is supposed to be released in September 2010 under the Belgian EU Presidency. Belgium is keen to build on this roadmap to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment and to work on the existing gaps such as the collection of EU wide timely, robust, comparable and sex-disaggregated data.

Asked in how far the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon changed the way the EU Delegation works, reports to and represents EU Member States at UN level, Mr. Serrano responded that the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty will take some time but will certainly help to be more coherent with a firmer direction. Especially through the new format of trio presidencies⁴ which work through a common agenda rather than only on a 6 months basis as has previously been the case. This longer-term approach means that relevant coordinators remain in office longer, allowing better access to a great deposit of knowledge and know-how. “This allows us to move forward much more effectively”, Serrano concluded.

Finally, Mr. Serrano encouraged Parliamentarians to pursue a strong stance on SRHR in their Parliaments at home. “Progress that you make in the European Parliament and at national level will help us here and will allow us to move much quicker”. With regard to our Turkish Delegates he referred to Turkey’s important role in reaching out to Islamic countries on the above-mentioned issues.

The UN CSW Negotiation Process

During “regular” meetings, the UN CSW adopts so-called “Agreed Conclusions” at the end of its deliberations, negotiated by members of national delegations and adopted by consensus. Agreed conclusions are non-binding and do not have any legislative impact on UN Members. Their political and symbolic value should, however, not be underestimated. These outcome documents set norms and standards for SRHR and other health and population related issues that organisations across

⁴ The current EU trio presidency consists of Spain-Belgium and Hungary and works on the basis of a common 18-months programme.

the world take note of. They often use these outcomes for further reference and advocacy efforts to increase own resources at country level.

This year's CSW was held in form of a 15 year review process. Therefore, only a short political declaration, based on previous regional consultations, was adopted on the second day of the Commission. The declaration reaffirmed the commitments made at Beijing and called for actions towards implementation.

In addition, seven resolutions were introduced on:

- HIV and AIDS, Women and the Girl Child
- Women's Economic Empowerment
- Eliminating Maternal Mortality and Morbidity through the Empowerment of Women
- Ending Female Genital Mutilation
- Release of women and children taken hostage
- The situation of and assistance to Palestinian women
- Strengthening institutional arrangement of the UN for support of gender equality and the empowerment of women by consolidating the four existing offices into a composite entity

During the meeting with Ms Adrienne Germain and Ms Alexandra Garita from the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) Delegates were confronted with the difficulties of the negotiation process for these resolutions, especially with regard to the Resolution on "Eliminating Maternal Mortality and Morbidity through the Empowerment of Women" and why Members of Parliament constitute key players in influencing the language adopted in these resolutions.



The Resolution on "Eliminating Maternal Mortality and Morbidity through the Empowerment of Women" was brought forth by the United States and was initially very weak, not including the linkages between promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls in order to eliminate maternal mortality and morbidity, including through providing access to sexual and reproductive health services and upholding their reproductive rights. It also failed to include complications from unsafe abortion as one of the leading causes of maternal mortality and morbidity (MMM) nor did it provide for the necessary comprehensive list of services needed to eliminate MMM, focusing only on ante-natal and post-natal care, skilled attendance at birth, and emergency obstetric care.

IWHC encouraged EPF Delegates to get in touch with their national delegations to speak out on and propose stronger language to be included in the resolution following the above-mentioned aspects. This is of vital importance, since the resolutions are not only taken to UN services but also to respective UN Member States to use them as reference and to act upon. The weaker these resolutions are, the less progress will be made in guaranteeing universal access to reproductive health services and maternal mortality at country level.

As a result, a number of EPF delegation members were in direct contact with representatives of their national delegations during the negotiations which contributed to a considerable strengthening of the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity resolution.

More specifically the final resolution on Eliminating Maternal Mortality and Morbidity through the Empowerment of Women:

- Includes concern over the fact that complications from pregnancy and childbirth among women between 15-19 are one of the leading causes of death in this age group
- Includes unsafe abortion as one of the leading causes of maternal deaths
- Reaffirms that gender equality cannot be achieved without promoting and protecting women's right to enjoy their SRH
- Recognition that maternal mortality is a health, development, and human rights issue

- Recognition that early pregnancy and childbirth present a much higher risk of complications during pregnancy and delivery and MMM
- Commits to implement Beijing and Cairo, including their commitments to SRH and reproductive rights and the promotion and protection of all human rights in this context, and to maximize efforts to eliminate preventable MMM through strengthening comprehensive SRH services to women and girls
- Calls for integration of HIV/AIDS interventions into SRH programs
- Recognizes the critical role of men and boys in sharing responsibilities to end MMM and promoting women's health including in accessing safe conditions for pregnancy and childbirth, contributing to family planning, preventing STIs and HIV, and ending VAW
- Decision to hold an expert panel discussion on eliminating preventable MMM and empowerment of women at next session (2011)

The role of the Vatican at UN level

The delegation visit also aimed to create a deeper understanding about the restrictions decision-makers, NGO's, IOs and SRHR advocates face in advancing the SRHR agenda at UN level. It cannot be denied that opposition groups (a number of faith-based organisations as well as pro-life NGOs) have gained influence at UN level in recent years. They have sought to reach out to establish contacts in almost all donor countries in an attempt to undermine the Cairo Agenda and hamper progress on reproductive health and women's rights. The meeting with Jon O'Brien and David J. Nolan from Catholics for Choice as well as the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore aimed at looking in more depth into the important role the Vatican as the only representative of a world religion plays at the UN.

The Vatican became a UN member in 1955 and was granted Non-State Permanent Observer status in 1964. Interestingly, the decision to accept the Holy See at the UN did not go before a voting body or a commission of the UN. After Switzerland became a full member of the United Nations in 2002, Palestine is the only member with the same status as the Vatican. In practice, this status grants the Vatican, which is represented by the Holy See, the "government" at UN level, the status enjoyed by member states at most UN conferences, including a voice during debates where the Vatican, alone among the world's religions, can make as many interventions as a member state.



Since the UN works on consensus basis and has become an important venue for policy discussions on public health issues, including sexuality and reproduction, the Vatican can and does obstruct consensus reached by member nations on critical issues such as SRHR. Jon O'Brien, however, pointed out that it is important to understand that Catholics do not equal the Holy See or the Vatican and that Catholics often have very different views on reproductive health than it is projected by the hierarchy.

Asked by Delegates why the Vatican so ardently opposes sexual and reproductive rights and if there would be leeway in working together on the concept of safe abortion for the health of women, Archbishop Migliore replied that if the reproductive health and rights concept would not entail access to abortion, the Holy See would be the first to support it. "Women do want children and abortion equals disrespect for women", the Archbishop stated continuing that it is key to improve health systems, to ensure that women deliver safely and are accompanied by skilled birth attendants –issues the Catholic Church works on in developing countries.

Asked if the Catholic Church's line on access to contraception is likely to change in the near future, the Archbishop referred to the Humana Vitae from 1968 which, for the Church is already a huge



success. He also took into consideration that the Vatican's stance on the use of condoms which follows the principle "every life is wanted" is one thing. Operating on the ground in many developing countries is another. Asked about his opinion on teenage pregnancy especially after abuse or rape and the access to safe abortion, the Archbishop replied that a girl would be shocked much more by undergoing an abortion than finding suitable alternatives within the family to keep and raise her child. The Vatican remains true to the principle "we do not take life" even if it is the product of violence. "What we have to do instead is to prevent violence against women arising during conflict and war", Archbishop Migliore stated.

Finally, Delegates invited the Archbishop to speak out more forcefully against forced and teen marriages at UN level. As a moral authority, this would be a topic the Holy See as a representative of the Vatican can develop a leadership role in.

VII. Conclusion

The week-long delegation visit has provided Members of Parliament with a better overview on how SRHR issues are being dealt with at UN level. The various expert meetings and participation in UN CSW and Inter-Parliamentary Union sessions have contributed to the awareness that the voice and commitment of Parliamentarians play a decisive role in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights. In addition, members have learned about the importance for European members to speak with one voice in SRHR issue at UN level and the difficulty to achieve this. Establishing information channels with relevant ministries can increase parliamentary input and might help to influence priority setting of governments prior to UN Commission meetings. A number of delegation participants felt empowered by the variety of information and insider knowledge they received on SRHR to engage in more direct dialogue with their executive at home.

Next to UN level decision-making insights, delegation members were confronted with the urgent need and importance to re-vitalise and re-commit to efforts to eliminate maternal mortality and morbidity, to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights with all its facets, as well as women's empowerment and gender equality and to ensure universal access to reproductive health. Especially with regard to the upcoming UN High Level Meeting on the MDGs in September 2010, putting MDG 5, where the least progress has been made, at the heart of the political agenda requires committed parliamentary involvement.

VIII. Follow up actions and activities

Jill Sheffield, Director of Women Deliver briefed Delegates on the upcoming Women Deliver Conference to be held from 7-9 June in Washington D.C. that provides a formidable follow-up occasion to call for strengthened financial and political support and commitment on maternal health. This landmark conference on MDG5 will bring together more than 3.000 policy-makers and experts on maternal health. Speakers confirmed include UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as well as Hillary R. Clinton. A Ministers Forum, a First Ladies Circle and a dedicated Parliamentarian's Forum will ensure involvement of key players and decision-makers on MDG 5, an area in which even after 20 years of efforts insignificant results have been reached. The main objective of this high-level meeting will be to take advantage of the G8 Summit in Canada just a few days after to deliver a powerful statement on the need for more investment in maternal health as well as the upcoming UN high level meeting on the MDGs.

Upon their return a number of Delegation members have engaged in dedicated follow-up activities and initiatives:

- Hon. Sirpa Pietikäinen, MEP and Hon. Danielle Bousquet, MP wrote articles on Women's health and rights in the European Parliament's in-house magazine "The Parliament Magazine" on the occasion of International Women's Day (8 March). The full article can be read [here](#);
- Hon. Danielle Bousquet, MP plans to inform the French Foreign Affairs Ministry about her participation as EPF delegate at the UN CSW and of her collaboration with the French delegation. Moreover she intends to debrief her APPG colleagues on the French position at the Conference as well as on the work of the Guttmacher Institute and its 2009 "Adding it up" study. In a letter to Hon. Eva-Britt Svensson, MEP Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Rights, Hon. Mendes Bota, MP and Chair of the Council of Europe's Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and Hon.



Ms Baido Almagro, Spanish Minister for Equality, Hon. Danielle Bousquet, MP drew the attention of these key decision-makers on an initiative of the French National Assembly on the harmonization of European women's rights according to the most favourable European legislation.

- Hon. Miapetra Kumpula-Natri, MP is in the process of organising a follow-up discussion on the outcomes of this year's UN Commission on the Status of Women in the Finnish Parliament in co-operation with Nytkis, the Finnish Women's Organisation on 20th April 2010. She also contacted the Chair of the Finnish United Nations Association on how best to co-ordinate efforts and strategies around the upcoming UN High Level Meeting on the MDGs in September;
- Hon. Christine McCafferty, MP has tabled a number of Parliamentary Questions to the UK Secretary of State for Development on the outcomes of UN Commission on the Status of Women, and if he will make a statement on it; what the Secretary of State's Department will do to make MDG 5 a budgetary priority and what his department is doing to ensure that when rapid population growth is identified as an issue for adaptation to climate change, National Adaptation Programmes of Action have budget lines for Family Planning;
- Hon Petra Bayr, MP has engaged in following up with the relevant Austrian Minister on Austria's support for the UN CSW Resolution on „Eliminating Maternal Mortality and Morbidity through the Empowerment of Women“.
- Senator Fiona O'Malley, Hon. Öznur Çalik, MP, Hon. Danielle Bousquet, MP and Hon. Petra Bayr, MP as Chairs of their respective All-Party Parliamentary Groups and Members of the EPF Council supported a letter to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper that urges the Canadian Government to include Family Planning and access to contraception as vital elements for maternal and child health in their discussion on the Maternal and Child Health Initiative that will be a priority topic during the upcoming G8 Summit in June 2010. Prime Minister Harper has previously refused include these components in the planned Initiative;
- As a result of our meeting with V-Day, a delegation of our Swiss Parliamentary Group "Caire+" together with representatives of the Swiss department of developmental cooperation will visit the V-Day project "City of Joy" in the Democratic Republic of Congo in May. The City of Joy is a community for survivors of sexual violence where traumatised women and girls find a safe haven to start the first steps into a new life.