

**MEETING OF THE OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
GOALS,**

March 31 – April 4, 2014

Statement of Latvia

Delivered by Ms. Inese Freimane-Deksne, Deputy Permanent Representative

**Cluster on gender equality and women's empowerment, education, employment
and decent work for all, health and population dynamics**

Latvia fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union.

We particularly thank the Co-chairs for their dedicated efforts and the revised text. We favour comprehensive and evidence-based approach that integrates all three dimensions of the sustainable development and effectively addresses inter-linkages between different areas of the new framework. Recalling the joint statement made on behalf of the group of countries, including Latvia, during the 8th session of the Open Working Group, in February, Latvia would like to convey the following observations:

1. A post-2015 development agenda that is truly effective and inclusive must **place people at the centre and tackle the root causes of inequalities and discrimination for all members of humankind**. The fulfilment of all human rights for all individuals without any discrimination should be the overarching aim of the SDGs and **a rights-based approach** must guide the new agenda.
2. **Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls must be reflected as a stand-alone priority, as well as integrated in a cross-cutting manner across all areas of the new agenda**. We are convinced that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential prerequisites for economic growth, environmental sustainability and sustainable development of families and societies.
3. Concrete and measurable targets in achieving gender equality should include: a) ending all forms of discrimination against women, inter alia, **by ensuring access to justice and revoking all gender-discriminatory legislation to ensure full equality under the law for women and girls**; b) ensuring equal access to education and **closing gender gaps** at all levels; c) **ensuring equal employment opportunities for women and equal pay for equal work**; d) **reducing women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work and promoting public awareness on shared responsibilities with men and boys**; e) **ending violence against girls and women in all its forms**; f) ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights to women **and adolescent girls**; g) ensuring women's equal access to **productive assets and resources, financial and banking services, to markets, and women's equal land, inheritance and property rights, as well as to information and communication technologies**; and h) ensuring equal participation of women in decision-making **in public**

and private sectors at all levels, including in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and strengthening women' collective action.

4. In order to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, the root causes of gender inequality such as unequal power relations, social norms, practices and gender stereotypes should be addressed. In this regard it is of crucial importance **to promote public awareness and develop education programmes**, with full engagement of men and boys, in order to facilitate informed decision-making and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls.
5. To close the gender pay gap and foster structural and sustainable change that could empower women, **the Focus area on Employment should reflect interlinkage with Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. A separate target under Focus area on Employment should address women's equal access to employment and equal participation of women in the labour force in all sectors.** It should also include **universal social protection that acknowledges the burden of women's unpaid care work and promotes access** to quality social services for all. Particular focus should be on family-friendly labour policies for maternity and paternity leave and affordable childcare. The MDGs report of 2013 clearly states that the gender gap in employment persists, with a 24.8 % difference between men and women in the employment-to-population ratio in 2012¹. In some regions the difference is as high as 50%. In addition, it is time to take all necessary actions to close the gender pay gap. For example, in Latvia, although gender pay gap has not increased over the last decade, women still earn 11-15% less than men on average, due to being employed in lower paid sectors.
6. We support **Education as one of the main focus areas** to eradicate poverty and to promote sustainable development. **We believe that emphasis should be put on universal quality education which is accessible to everyone at all levels, including lifelong learning.** Education for All Global monitoring report 2013/14 is clear that universal access to education is not enough to ensure sustainable development of societies - the quality of education is a decisive factor. Therefore the quality of education and lifelong learning should be properly reflected in sub-areas under the Focus area on Education.
7. We also support sub-area g) under the Focus area on Education that invites to „integrate sustainable development in education curricula, including awareness raising on how culture advances sustainable development.”
8. Regarding the **Focus area on Health**, a separate targets should include, inter alia,: a) **equitable access to quality universal health care that is affordable and focused on prevention**; b) **universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, including through universal access to quality integrated sexual and reproductive health information, education and services that include modern methods of family planning**; c) elimination of

¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/7/the-gender-dimension-of-the-millennium-development-goals-report-2013/#sthash.K2HT92fH.dpuf>

preventable child and maternal deaths; d) significant reduction of child **and maternal morbidity**; d) the prevention and treatment of communicable (HIV/AIDS) and noncommunicable diseases; e) **universal access to essential services for all survivors of gender-based and sexual violence.**

On the basis of those preliminary observations, Latvia is looking forward to further fruitful discussions and will play a constructive role in the preparations of the future development agenda.

I thank you.