

17 February 2017

Madam High Representative, Mr Commissioner,

With this letter we wish to underscore our firm support for human rights, gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and our strong commitment to the European Union's *Council Conclusions on Gender in Development* of May 2015 and the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 of October 2015. We would also like to restate our commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the clear objective of leaving no one behind, and to the empowerment of women and girls as key drivers of sustainable development.

We are concerned over the US reinstatement of an expanded version of the Mexico City Policy. We believe in the right of every woman and every girl to decide freely about matters relating to her own body and life. The EU's commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights remains particularly important and relevant in the current political climate.

Almost 225 million women and girls have an unmet need for contraception. Every day, over 800 women and girls die from preventable causes related to pregnancy or child birth. Annually 22 million unsafe abortions occur. With less funding for sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies, these numbers are expected to rise further.

Collectively we have a responsibility not to allow this to happen. A number of EU Member States are longstanding and strong political and financial supporters of the SRHR agenda. Additionally, several new initiatives have been taken by individual EU Member States including fundraising and plans for a Ministerial Conference 'She Decides' to increase political and financial support for the agenda. We are also reaching out to ministerial colleagues in other regions globally to build an alliance with them.

We expect the EU to show solidarity with the millions of women, girls and adolescents who need access to modern methods of contraception, information and services. In this regard, we wish to remind you of the 'fill the decency gap' approach adopted by the Commission in 2001 at which time the EU increased support to affected organisations to counter the impact of the US policy. We call upon the European Union to increase its funding for and make greater use of its influence in support of sexual and reproductive health and rights. It would be very timely to take stock of these matters at our informal meeting in March.

Ms. Federica MOGHERINI
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice-President of the European Commission

Mr. Neven MIMICA
Commissioner
International Cooperation and Development