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Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November 2010

Today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. I take this opportunity to call on the international community to work harder to counter violence against women worldwide.

Violence against women and girls is probably the most widespread human rights violation of our time. It claims millions of victims each year, cuts across age, socio-economic, educational and geographic boundaries and affects all societies.

Sexual violence and rape as a tool of war bring about grave suffering and undermine peace-building as well as economic development. The tenth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is an opportunity to strengthen the fight against sexual violence, to empower women to take action in securing peace and to bring perpetrators to justice. A decade after the fact, the EU is ready to lead by example.

However, violence against women is by no means a problem limited to conflicts. Eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls is a priority for the European Union. I urge all countries to step up their fight against impunity and to protect and reintegrate victims of violence. These include women and girls affected by harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, female infanticide and pre-natal sex selection as well as victims of domestic violence, which is one of the most common and least visible forms of violence against women. The EU will support third countries in their efforts.

P R E S S

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The establishment of a new UN entity dedicated to women's rights and gender equality, "UN Women," should help bolster the capacity of the international community to counter violence against women. I look forward to close collaboration with UN Women.
