Joint Statement on the International Day against Female Genital Mutilation

On the occasion of the International Day of Zero Tolerance against Female Genital Mutilation (6 February 2013) High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission Catherine Ashton, Vice-President Viviane Reding, the EU’s Justice Commissioner, Development Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva, responsible for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, responsible for Home Affairs, and Commissioner Tonio Borg, responsible for Health Policy made the following statement:

"According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), every year, millions of women and girls in the EU and around the world are subjected to the brutal practice of female genital mutilation and many more are at risk. 6 February marks the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation – a day when we raise global awareness about this issue and reaffirm our strong commitment to eradicating this extremely harmful practice that violates the rights of girls and women to physical and mental integrity. Female genital mutilation violates human rights and the rights of women and girls. Our top priority should be prevention – helping to ensure that no girl will ever again have to experience this traumatic breach of their rights.

We need to complement existing national legislation prohibiting the practice by raising awareness about the detrimental effects of female genital mutilation on the psychological and physical health of women and girls and by providing support services for victims.

That is why the European Union is taking action both abroad and at home.
Beyond the EU, a joint EU-UNICEF project has helped thousands of families, communities and countries to change attitudes about female genital mutilation and other harmful practices in Africa. We commend the African Union and its Member States for its leadership in the adoption by a United Nations Resolution to help tackle female genital mutilation. This is an important step forward in the global fight against violence and discrimination against women and girls. The EU is committed to reaching a strong and action-oriented outcome on Violence against Women in the forthcoming UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Within the EU, the new victims' directive will make sure that victims of violence against women, including victims of this harmful practice, get the specialised support and attention they need. Particular attention is also given to this group in our asylum legislation. Women who are at risk of female genital mutilation, or parents who fear persecution because they refuse to have their child undergo this practice can be granted international protection in the EU.

On 6 March, we will be holding a roundtable discussion with leading campaigners and parliamentarians to discuss the way forward. We will consult governments, NGOs and those with direct experience of female genital mutilation. We will also make funding available for activities to raise awareness of this practice.

Violence toward women and girls is not cultural. It is criminal. The European Commission and the European External Action Service remain fully committed to combatting all forms of gender-based violence both within the EU and in our external relations.