

**Speech by Mr. Diego Escalona Paturel
Head of the Operations Section at the EU Delegation to Lebanon**

Launching ceremony of 15 youth friendly centres

**EU funded project entitled “Protecting Adolescents from Gender based Violence
through the Promotion of their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights”**

Tamar Rotana Hotel Hazmieh, Beirut
17 September 2012

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellency Mr. Wael Abu Faour, Minister of Social Affairs

Mrs Ruba Khoury, Director of Save the Children

Mrs Zoya Rouhana, Director of KAFA

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today 15 youth centres which will provide information and support on sexual and reproductive health and rights are becoming operational.

The youth centres could be established thanks to the support of the Lebanese government, Save the Children, KAFA and many others who contributed within the framework of a regional programme funded by the EU with 1,350,000 Euros for Lebanon, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Fifteen educative establishments, primary health clinics and community-based structures have benefited from capacity building and have been equipped to become fully-fledged information centres to the benefit of young people.

These centres will hopefully give space to adolescents and children to empower them about their rights, learn how to prevent, communicate and act. Sexual and reproductive health is important to us all, at all stages of our lives. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are basic human rights, yet far too many people are denied these rights.

Youth need to make informed, safe and healthy choices. We all need to make informed, safe and healthy choices. While the subject in itself is very sensitive, cutting right across different cultural and religious beliefs, adolescents should have a right to age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health information, education, and services that enable them to deal positively and responsibly with their sexuality. Unfortunately, in Lebanon, such access to services and information for children and adolescents is still too limited.

Real improvements to sexual and reproductive health will depend on investments in education, governance, gender, social and economic development. Communities need a social environment that fosters sustained behavioural change. Lebanon's youth can count on support from the EU in all these areas but should also feel re-assured they get support from their caretakers, governments, communities, teachers whenever needed. Through the right information, prevention and protection a lot can be achieved without necessarily breaking with tradition, belief and conviction. It can be done. It has to be done.

Thank you.