

Statement on
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
and
Water and Sanitation for a Sustainable World
By Croatia and Bulgaria
At 11th session of OWG SDGs

Mr. Co-Chair,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of Croatia and Bulgaria.

Croatia and Bulgaria recognize the vital role of women as agents of development, and share the opinion that gender equality and the empowerment of women must be achieved to accelerate sustainable development beyond 2015.

In on-going debate on how the post-2015 development framework can ensure effective progress towards gender equality, Croatia and Bulgaria strongly support **gender equality and the empowerment of women as a stand-alone goal** which should be integrated through targets and indicators into all goals of the new development framework.

While it is widely recognized that securing gender equality is among basic principles in the respect for human rights and the key imperative for overall economic and political progress, no country has yet achieved full equality for women and girls, and women are still underrepresented and sometimes even marginalized in most countries.

To reach the ambitious goal of full and equal participation of women, we have to tackle critical remaining challenges and address the structural causes of gender inequality, such as violence against women and girls, early and forced marriage, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, persistent gender disparity in secondary and tertiary education, unequal employment opportunity and the gender wage gap, unpaid care work, limited control over assets and property, and unequal participation in private and public decision-making.

Unless all these dimensions of gender inequality are addressed, gender equality, the empowerment of women and the realization of human rights of women and girls cannot be achieved. Therefore, Croatia and Bulgaria strongly support all specific targets proposed within the focus area 5 (Gender equality and women's empowerment) of the present working document distributed by Co-Chairs.

In our opinion, to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, it is of utmost importance to transform discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes including those that limit women's roles to being mothers and caregivers. It is equally important to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spaces, including all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, through reviewing, adopting, enacting and enforcing laws and regulations that prohibit such practices, creating awareness around their harmful health consequences, and generating social support for the enforcement of these laws

Furthermore, the comprehensive 2015 development framework should not leave behind the women and girls in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, and women's effective participation at all levels and at all stages of the peace processes should be ensured, as laid out in relevant Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. In that context, our commitment to end sexual violence in conflict and to end impunity by ensuring accountability and punishing perpetrators of these most serious crimes against women and girls should be also clearly reflected in post 2015 development framework.

On the Focus Area 6: Water and Sanitation, let me stress that we are among the countries that consider the right to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights, as recognized by UNGA resolution 64/292 and Human Rights Council resolution 15/9. Croatia and Bulgaria believe that safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, management of water resources, wastewater management and water quality are all indispensable elements for poverty eradication, sustainability and security of the world; that needs to address the challenge of nearly half of global population, that are forecast to face the water scarcity and water stress by 2030.

In that sense, we believe access to safe drinking water and sanitation along with ensuring **sustainable use of water resources** are central to human development and sustainable livelihoods. On the issue of **sanitation and hygiene** we propose the elaboration of target a) so that it reads: *By 2030: to eliminate open defecation; to achieve universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for households, schools and health facilities; to halve the proportion of the population without access at home to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services; and to progressively eliminate inequalities in access.*

The **consolidation and implementation of integrated water management** is necessary to achieve improvements in crucial priorities such as water efficiency, which is a growing concern in the context of adaptation to climate change and water scarcity and water quality. **Water cooperation**, including for transboundary water bodies, is of major importance, including in security/conflict prevention terms, especially in a context of additional pressure on resources, climate change and extreme events, such as floods and drought. Croatia and Bulgaria would like to highlight the importance of **equitable, participatory and accountable water governance** and, in that sense, we would like to add '*participatory management*' of water resources to the target d)¹ since it has important interlinkages with other focus areas including health, food security and governance.

To sum up, Croatia and Bulgaria believe that the water 'is the only medium through which major global crises of food, energy, health and climate change, as well as economic crises can be jointly addressed'² which together with sanitation, we see as an important stand-alone goal in the future set of SDGs for the water-secure world.

Thank you for your attention.

¹ It would read: *implement integrated and participatory water resource management, including appropriate transboundary cooperation.*

² UN World Water Development report 4

