

Statement by

His Excellency Mr. Carsten Staur,  
Permanent Representative of the Mission of Denmark to the United Nations



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## **Statement of Denmark**

### **Agenda Item 4**

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**44<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Population and Development Agenda item 4**  
**“General Debate on national experience in population matters: Fertility, reproductive health and development”**

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H.E. Carsten Staur, Permanent Representative of Denmark

Mr. Chairman,

At this meeting of the Commission on Population and Development we should indeed celebrate. Not because we have achieved the Cairo goals, that unfortunately is still not the case. But because the recent decision to extend the ICPD Programme of Action clearly proves that member states remain strongly committed to the Cairo vision. We all agree that the struggle continues, until the work is done.

Denmark aligns itself with the EU-statement, also in pointing out that the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 was a groundbreaking event. Placing human rights and individuals and communities at the centre of population and development issues represented a significant paradigm shift in development policy. The ICPD was historic in shifting the population debate away from a top down approach focused on human numbers to a bottom up approach focused on the right of women and men to decide freely on matters relating to their reproduction and sexuality.

The ICPD Programme of Action made clear that there is a right for all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so. ICPD further made clear that there is also a right for all couples and individuals to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health and to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence. The promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, access for all to a comprehensive reproductive health service package – including contraceptives – as well as comprehensive sexuality education is of paramount importance in actually allowing each individual to decide freely and responsibly the

number, spacing and timing of children. These concepts have also played centre stage roles in the development policies and programs of Denmark.

Denmark is at the forefront when it comes to promoting SRHR in partner countries, including reducing maternal mortality. We support the health sector in 5 African countries and a range of key international organizations working with advocacy, capacity building and reproductive health services at country level. To give you an example: Our support to Marie Stopes International will contribute to provide 1 million safe abortions and distribute more than 160 million condoms.

We will continue to actively support and promote women's health and rights. It is the right thing to do – and it pays off. We know for a fact that healthy women provide more and better for their children, families and communities. Women who can plan the timing and number of their children have greater opportunities for work, education and involvement in the development of their society. Healthy women who are able to earn an income are more likely (than men) to spend their earnings on food, education, medicine and other necessities for the family.

Freedom – equal opportunities for women and men – are key words in Denmark's development cooperation. It is unacceptable that in 2011 we continue to witness far too many women around the world with no rights to decide over their own body, and that we witness so many women and girls denied their rights to full and equal participation in the development of their societies.

With only 5 years left to achieve the Millenium Development Goals the need to improve women's health and overcome social and cultural barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights is more urgent than ever.

There is a strong link between women's empowerment and women's access to health. Access to free and skilled maternal health services and effective health systems shall be

ensured by increased political leadership. Neglected areas such as sexual and reproductive health and rights should be addressed. This includes access to safe and legal abortion and expanded access to family planning. In this regard effective implementation of national health plans, strengthening of health systems and active community work is key.

Finally, let me draw your attention to the new strategy for Denmark's development cooperation launched by the Danish Government last year. It states that our development policy is based on the fundamental concept that all human beings are born free and equal with inalienable rights. Without political and economic freedom people are kept in poverty.

The new strategy comprises five specific focus areas for Danish development cooperation. One of these focus areas is gender equality, including also a strong focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The priority given to gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights is embedded in the freedom and rights concept. It is accordingly based on our conviction that women must be empowered – or empower themselves – so that they can claim their rights and ask for equal opportunities. Otherwise we will not see sustainable development.

Thank you.