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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

Denmark welcomes this opportunity to address the 43rd session of the Commission on Population and Development. The theme of this year's Commission: "Health, Morbidity, Mortality and Development" is of utmost importance given the strong links between health and sustainable development.

My delegation appreciates the important opportunity this Commission represents for a continuous and systematic follow-up of the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and its Key Actions for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action adopted five years later.

Mr. Chairman,

While Denmark associates itself with the statement made by Spain on behalf of the European Union I would like to share with you some important aspects relating to Denmark's focus on gender equality and empowerment of women, including the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

With only 5 years left to achieve the MDGs, 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.

We all know the sad facts: Every year half a million women die as a result of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, every year there are an estimated 19 million unsafe abortions in the developing world, 215 million women who would like to use contraceptives do not have the access. But we also know that some countries have been able to make significant improvements with political commitment and the right policies in place.

Rights – equal rights – are key words in Denmark’s development cooperation. It is unacceptable that in 2010 we continue to witness far too many women around the world with no rights to decide over their body, and that we witness so many women and girls denied their rights to full and equal participation in the development of their societies.

It is a fact that 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 provide more and better for their children, families and communities. 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. In turn, the death or disability of a mother raises death and illness rates for children, destroys families, takes children out of school and reduces household and community economic productivity.

Genuine and honest gender equality is a basic human right, but it also has an economic side. Gender equality positively influences sustainable economic development that benefits men and women, families, societies and nations. We know that investment in women pays off. All research shows that women are key drivers and agents of change.

Mr. Chairman,

In 2008 Denmark initiated the “MDG3 Global Call to Action” to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. We are convinced that MDG3 on gender equality is not only a goal in itself but also a means to accelerating progress and achieve on the other development goals. As part of our global initiative more than 140 torch bearers have committed to “do something extra” for gender equality – for equal rights, for women’s rights to equal economic and employment opportunities and for women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Many governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society and prominent individuals have joined the torch campaign, and our status report (of September last year) tells us that the campaign works. The MDG3 torch bearers are walking the talk.

Gender equality is a top priority for the Danish government, and Denmark continues efforts to put MDG3 on a faster track. This was clearly demonstrated at the high level MDG3 conference held just weeks ago in Copenhagen on 25 March. The conference, hosted by the Minister for Development Cooperation, discussed how to increase women's employment opportunities and their economic empowerment. The conference resulted in the following five recommendations:

1. Economic empowerment of women as a rights' issue and as smart economics.
2. Expansion of women's entrepreneurship opportunities.
3. Creation of opportunities to overcome social and cultural barriers.
4. Priority for women's health, incl. sexual and reproductive health and rights.
5. Women's voice and political participation.

The recommendation on women's health reads as follows: "Recognize the strong link between women's employment opportunities and women's access to health by increasing political leadership to ensure access to free and skilled maternal health services and effective health systems that deliver on women's health. Strengthen implementation of national health plans and health systems as well as active community work to address neglected areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including unsafe abortion and the provision of expanded access to family planning."

The recommendations will feed into the MDG High-level meeting in September. And we hope that all our partners will actively promote the recommendations.

Thank you.