

Statement by

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Madame Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome this opportunity to address the Commission on the Status of Women at its 54th session. While I would like to associate myself with the statement made by Spain on behalf of the European Union, I would like to share with you some important aspects and lessons learned relating to our efforts to achieve genuine gender equality in Denmark as well as internationally.

And let me add Denmark's strong voice to those having welcomed the new UN Gender Entity. Our expectations are as high as our commitment to support the gender equality and women's empowerment.

Madame Chair

I am especially glad to participate in this session as we are not only celebrating the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action but also discussing the important follow-up. The Declaration and the Platform for Action were landmarks for gender equality and their valuable impact is undeniable. We owe a lot to the Declaration, and we have an obligation to implement the Platform for Action.

Denmark's determination to promote gender equality nationally as well as internationally is based on two solid arguments:

First, gender equality is a fundamental human right enshrined in all international human rights instruments and standards, and it applies to everyone. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we find the principles of non-discrimination and equality together with a general recognition of the human rights of women and men. These rights also include the right to decide on sexual and reproductive matters. Women all over the world must have access to information and preventive services that enable them to decide freely on matters relating to their sexuality and health.

Second, we are convinced that gender equality is a prerequisite for reducing poverty, promoting economic growth and for sustainable, peaceful development.

There is no doubt, that the economic growth that Danes have been fortunate to enjoy is inextricably linked to the gains made in promoting gender equality over the past many decades. But it has been a long and hard battle for equal rights and opportunities – a battle that is not over yet.

What are indeed the gains that we see over the last decades?

The Danish society is characterised as a fairly equal society and indeed it is a priority for the Government to secure equal opportunities for all men and women. Economic independence is crucial for achieving gender equality. In general, both women and men are active on the labour market, the educational level is high for both sexes, and we are fortunate that women and men share many of the care-giving responsibilities. We have long and flexible parental schemes, a fertility rate around 1.9 and guaranteed day care facilities for all children. Furthermore, both women and men participate in political and decision making processes.

Denmark has been called one of the most gender equal societies in the world. Maybe so! But there is still room for improvement.

I wish to underline our commitment and obligation to further strengthening gender equality in Denmark to ensure de facto equality in areas where women face challenges or discrimination. We have to do more to eliminate the gender pay gap, to ensure an equal balance in top management positions, and put an end to domestic violence and human trafficking.

Madame Chair,

We are currently focusing our efforts on 4 core aspects:

Firstly: To promote more women in top management, we have launched a Charter on women in management. We believe it is of crucial importance to cooperate with the

private sector, and we know that we have a mutual interest in achieving a better balance, as it is an economic advantage for companies to have both women and men represented in top management.

By signing the Charter, companies voluntarily commit themselves to developing strategies and setting goals that are ambitious but realistic at company level.

Secondly: The Government is committed to combat domestic violence and human trafficking. And we have launched several national action plans. Our comprehensive efforts have had significant positive effect since our efforts since 2002 has diminished the amount of women suffering from partner violence by approximately one third. And we will continue these efforts.

Thirdly: In Denmark gender equality must be ensured for ALL women – including migrant women. The free choice of education, career, family life and when – or if – to have children are important choices and part of our fundamental rights. To this end, Denmark wishes to empower migrant women and bring about a positive change within traditional patriarchal family patterns.

By information campaigns, debate and concrete support the Government is committed to help migrant women in building awareness of their fundamental rights and enhance their possibilities to choose freely.

Fourthly: No discrimination on grounds of gender may take place according to the Act on Equal Pay to Men and Women. The employment rate for women in Denmark is one of the highest in the world. Nearly all women in Denmark have paid work and therefore are able support themselves economically. Of course such a situation has an enormous impact on the Danish society in all walks of life. Unfortunately, the high employment rate for women does not exist across all sectors. In fact, the labour market is very gender segregated and pay differentials between men and women persist.

We have already taken a number of steps to rectify the situation. For instance, from 1 January 2007 major enterprises, both public and private, are required to prepare gender-divided wage statistics. The statistics will indicate whether the companies have equal pay for men and women. The result is to be analysed during 2010. We produce inspiring material for companies, and we constantly try to develop these initiatives so they are suitable to change attitudes among companies.

Madame Chair,

Let me take you from the national to the international scene. There is a strong link between Denmark's national achievements and our relentless support for ensuring gender equality globally.

Rights – equal rights – are key words in Denmark's development cooperation. It is unbelievable that we in 2010 witness so many women around the world with no rights to decide over their body. That we witness so many women denied their rights to full and equal participation in the development of their societies.

Genuine and honest gender equality is a prerequisite for developing harmonious and prosperous societies. It is fundamental for opportunities as well as for responsibilities - and for sound economic development benefitting men and women, families, societies and nations. All research shows that women are key drivers and agents of change, they have a multiplier effect and we know that investment in women pays off.

Madame Chair,

The economic and financial crisis has diverse impact on poor women and men in the developing countries, primarily on the poorest and most vulnerable - the poor women. It is apparent that the spread of the crisis has led to major setbacks in delivering on the global commitments made in the Millennium Declaration. It will curtail non-agricultural employment and livelihood options for poor families and will affect the intensity and distribution of unpaid work, mostly affecting women and girls. It is therefore of paramount importance that we act with dedication and act now.

In 2008, Denmark initiated the “MDG3 Global Call to Action” to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. We are convinced that gender equality is a key to accelerating progress on the other development goals. As part of our global initiative more than 140 torches have been given in return for commitments 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.

The impressive response to Denmark’s campaign underlines political will to achieve the development goals. It also underlines the will to accompany supportive words with technical assistance and financial allocations. It is encouraging in a situation where we must acknowledge that we are falling far behind in achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals - and also when we have to realize that progress to full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action could be more satisfactory.

Madame Chair,

I am confident that you are all familiar with the Danish efforts to include gender in the process leading up to the UN Conference on Climate Change - COP 15 - in Copenhagen. Climate change will especially seriously affect the lives and livelihoods of women but women are also powerful actors in combating it. Let me reassure you that we will continuously work to promote women’s empowerment in the efforts to combat negative effects of climate change.

The Danish government maintains gender equality as a top priority and that is in an all comprising concept. That is clearly reflected in the programme of a high level MDG3

conference to be held in Copenhagen in a couple of weeks - on 25 March on women's empowerment and employment. The conference, hosted by the Minister for Development Cooperation, will discuss how to increase women's employment opportunities in a comprehensive approach and do so with focus on 1. economic frameworks, 2. socio-cultural barriers and 3. women's health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. The conference will feed recommendations into the New York MDG High-level meeting in September and also contribute to progress on the Beijing Platform for Action.

In our endeavours to promote and ensure gender equality we will work with partners, civil society and the private sector and not least in UN system. We are looking forward to cooperation with the new UN gender entity. We see the entity as a prerequisite for the UN to deliver effectively and coordinated on gender equality and women's empowerment – especially at country level.

Madame Chair,

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the Danish Government's unwavering commitment to fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action. We have come far - but there is still substantial work to do.

Thank you!