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Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women  
Fifth session  
10 - 21 March 1986

Excerpted from: Supplement No. 45 (A/41/45)

Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women: Denmark

Initial report

32. The Committee considered the initial report of Denmark (CEDAW/C/Add.22) at its 66th and 72nd meetings, on 11 and 14 March (CEDAW/C/SR.66 and 72).

33. The representative of Denmark, in her introduction of the country report, stated that the report was completed in 1984 and was prepared by the Danish Government with the involvement of the whole Government administration. Her presentation of the report included the provision of a booklet of statistical data.

34. The representative of Denmark informed the Committee that the official work on equality between men and women began in 1975 with the establishment of the Equal Status Council. However, even before that, organizations for women have played an important role in, for example, obtaining the right to vote in 1915 and in discussions on important issues facing the Government. The proportion of women holding elected offices has been rising over the years and at present it stands at 26.3 per cent, but organizations for women as well as the Danish Parliament have considered that improvement is required. The new bill on equality between women and men in connection with selecting members to public councils, committees, etc. passed in April 1985 seemed to have had a positive effect already.

35. It was pointed out that the number of women in the labour force had increased from 49.1 per cent in 1967 to 64.2 per cent in 1984. However, at the end of 1985, the unemployment rate for women was 11 per cent as compared with 6.8 per cent for men. Some of the reasons for this may lie in the fact that women chose fewer lines of work than men. However, campaigns and educational programmes for women have begun to increase the opportunities that are available to women. Equal opportunity consultants have also been appointed to deal with this question. Because of the sexually segregated labour market, in addition to the differences in length of service and academic attainment, there was also a discrepancy in salary scales for men and women.

36. The representative of Denmark drew attention to the Maternity Leave Act dated 21 February 1984 providing for maternity leave of 4 weeks prior to childbirth and up to 24 weeks following childbirth, with 10 weeks also provided to the father. However, there are still instances, it was noted, of discriminatory practices in employment conditions connected with pregnancy and childbirth.

37. The representative of Denmark referred to the decline in the number of contractual marriages, the increase in the divorce rate and in consensual unions. Reference was also made to recommendations emanating from a committee established to deal with rape victims. The question of domestic violence in Denmark has been given a great deal of attention and centres have been established to deal with such problems.

38. A considerable amount of money has been given to Danish research on women.

39. There have been improvements in the collection of statistics and research on the status of women and collaboration has also been established with the Parliament of Greenland. Since the ratification of the Convention, the Danish Parliament has amended legislation relating to certain aspects of old-age pensions to ensure equality of men and women, and reforms to the taxation system are presently being considered.

40. The representative of Denmark informed the Committee that following the Nairobi Conference, the Danish Parliament has requested the formulation of a national plan of action on equal rights by January 1987.

41. Members of the Committee commended the Government of Denmark for its report, which clearly reflected the commitment of the Danish Government to implement the articles of the Convention. It was observed from the report that the ratification of the Convention had not per se been of great significance in eliminating discrimination against women in Denmark, but that the establishment of the Equal Status Council in 1975 was the most important measure adopted in this respect. Nevertheless, the provisions of the Convention do serve as a basis, binding upon Denmark under international law, for a corresponding set of domestic rules of law.

42. Some members of the Committee noted that while there was much evidence of legislation, rules and regulations and programmes relating to the elimination of discrimination against women in Denmark, discrimination in some areas continued to persist in modern Denmark and the difficulty of changing attitudes continued to be a matter that required attention, as with other countries. It was important, therefore, several experts pointed out, to assess the obstacles encountered. At the same time, it was noted as encouraging that quite an amount of affirmative action programmes were being carried out in different fields.

43. Many members expressed interest in obtaining more statistical data, particularly in education, employment and social benefits, as well as demographic data.

44. More information, particularly in terms of statistical data, was requested on pre-school facilities, literacy rates, levels of education between males and females, academic attainment and the corresponding careers which were followed, types of jobs chosen, including employment and unemployment rates and vocational programmes. One expert asked whether education was free in Denmark and until what age was schooling compulsory.

45. Several members requested more data on women working at home; whether part-time employment was included in the figure given for female participation in the labour force; and whether part-time employment and employment at home affected the provision of social security, health and other benefits. One expert also asked whether women had equal access to credit.

46. Some members expressed interest in knowing whether there were statistical data on the number of men taking paternity leave; whether pensions were affected by maternity and paternity leave; and what pre-school facilities were available and at what cost. Questions were also raised on the low birthrate, whether it was compatible with Denmark's population policies, whether there were any incentives given to achieve national goals in this area; and whether family planning programmes had a significant impact. Some members also requested statistics on the marriage age for men and women. One expert requested information on the rights given to women with regard to abortion.
47. Some members requested details on legislation against discriminatory advertising and on the new act on women's representation in committees, etc. It was asked whether any evaluation had been carried out on the effectiveness of the Equal Opportunities Act and whether the Act was only an anti-discrimination act not making affirmative action a general obligation.
48. Some questions were raised on laws concerning violence against women and on the criminal justice system in the context of female offenders and victims. One expert questioned whether prostitution was considered an offence under Danish law and whether all parties involved were liable. The question of pornography was also raised by one expert.
49. Some members noted the high divorce rate and asked whether laws for division of property took into account the different roles, earning levels, etc. of the spouses. With regard to consensual unions, clarification was also requested on the division of property and rights of children if any involved.
50. More statistical information was requested on the participation of women in such areas as political parties, decision-making posts in the Government, the legal system and in international forums, as well as in the armed forces.
51. One expert wondered whether the principles of the Convention would be incorporated into the Constitution of Denmark, since such action would avoid changes of views that may be held by different political parties at different times.
52. The representative of Denmark, in responding to the questions raised, expressed regret that the report did not have sufficient statistical data and informed the Committee that such data would be included in the next report.
53. In response to questions concerning demographic matters, the representative stated that out of a population of 5 million people in 1985, women numbered 2,594,000 and the larger number of women was mainly because they lived longer than men in Denmark. She also stated that infant mortality was negligible.
54. With regard to questions concerning the Equal Status Council, the representative pointed out that recommendations from the Council were often implemented by the authorities, particularly since there was an official goal and policy for improving the situation of women in Denmark. The Equal Status Council had also dealt with more than 90 cases of discrimination in the labour market, many of which were concerned with the training of women for jobs that were traditionally held by men.
55. With regard to the question concerning the possibility of incorporating the principles of the Convention into the Danish Constitution, the representative replied that, while there had not been a change in the Constitution since 1953, the

date of the amendment making it possible for Denmark to have a female monarch, there had not in practice been any difficulty in translating international instruments into national legislation where necessary, and domestic rules were interpreted in accordance with Denmark's international obligations.

56. In response to questions concerning elected officials, the representative informed the Committee that with the new bill on equality of April 1985, approximately 25 per cent of the appointed members of the newly established committees were women. Moreover, the new bill has provided that the appointing authorities and organizations are required to appoint two persons, one of them being a woman, and that that would undoubtedly help to improve the representation of women on the committees. The Equal Status Council was also active in encouraging the political parties to promote more representation of women in the political parties. Two parties in Denmark had also taken positive action in order to improve women's representation. While there were at present no women holding high posts in the Foreign Office, there was one female judge on the Supreme Court, and it was expected that more women would be occupying higher posts in the near future, especially since more women were now rising through the ranks.

57. With regard to questions concerning discriminatory advertisements, the representative stated that both the Consumer Affairs Ombudsman and the Equal Status Council could request the withdrawal of such advertisements; non-compliance would result in a court case.

58. About 25 per cent of the men in Denmark had made use of the provisions under the Maternity Leave Act for leave of two weeks after the birth of his child. Only 5 to 10 per cent had made use of the 10 weeks' leave that he was sharing with the mother, since that meant a reduction of 10 per cent from his salary during his leave. The Ministry of Labour was reviewing favourably measures to ensure that those who had taken maternity leave would not suffer economic losses in terms of salary and pension rights.

59. The representative of Denmark informed the Committee that single parents received a higher family allowance and discussions were presently under way for better support for families. There was a strong network of child-care facilities in Denmark, a third of their resources being financed by public communities.

60. Health services in Denmark, the representative replied, were free and there were special facilities for pregnant women. In Denmark abortion was legal and free.

61. The representative of Denmark informed the Committee that even though domestic science and needlework were obligatory subjects for both boys and girls at school, women ended up performing three times as much household duties as men, but that this was gradually changing, particularly since men were beginning to be aware that their non-participation in household duties was often cited among the grounds for divorce.

62. In reply to questions, the representative informed the Committee that prostitution was not illegal in Denmark. It was neither encouraged nor subject to punishment, but women were encouraged to have a "normal" job as well, which was considered necessary for their survival. Child pornography was forbidden and other pornography was becoming less visible and less important an issue since women were beginning to find other kinds of work for support.

63. The representative indicated that women's organizations in Denmark were mostly private but basic expenses were usually covered by public funds.

64. The representative responded that adopted children received the nationality of their parents. In cases of divorce or separations, mothers usually were given custody of the children but, under new legislation, it was common to find joint custody.

65. Schools were now beginning to encourage girls to take courses that would enable them to seek employment in labour markets traditionally held by men. It has been found that women who have higher education make use of their education, even though many of them hold part-time positions. Although part-time workers received the same rights to pensions, unemployment support, etc., their salaries were generally lower. While equal pay was the law, differences in salaries were usually because of a sex-segregated labour market. Discriminatory practices were often related to pregnant women but labour organizations and the Equal Status Council have been successful in courts when dealing with such discrimination.

66. In response to a question on protective legislation, the representative of Denmark informed the Committee that there was no such legislation except for pregnant women in certain cases. Research was also carried out in order to find out what jobs are dangerous for pregnant women and, at the same time, it was found that many of these jobs are dangerous to men as well.

67. In response to questions about ownership of property, the representative of Denmark informed the Committee that spouses have joint ownership of property and the tax equality spouse act treated women and men on equal terms.

68. With regard to women's involvement in the peace movement, the representative of Denmark pointed out that such involvement, although not an official government activity, reflected the democratic process and in fact many politicians often participated in such movements.