

**PERMANENT MISSION OF DENMARK  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

Statement by

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Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations



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**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

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Mister Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome this opportunity to address the Commission on the Status of Women at its 55<sup>th</sup> session. While I would like to associate myself with the statement made by Hungary on behalf of the European Union, I would also like to share with you some reflections on the importance of access for women and girls – as well as for boys - to education based on lessons learned throughout our efforts to achieve genuine gender equality in Denmark as well as internationally.

Mister Chair,

Every year, we benefit from this important session to take stock of the status of girl's and women's empowerment. But a prerequisite for their empowerment is to obtain genuine equality for women and men, boys and girls, worldwide. Today, in addition to talking about women, I would like to turn our attention to the role of men. Men are key to improving conditions for women. As decision-makers, as colleagues, partners and parents. And at the same time, men and boys must not be overlooked in the equation, when striving for equality.

This year we celebrate the 100th International Women's Day. The efforts to improve equal opportunities have been monumental during this century, but sadly, in so many places girls and women are still deprived of opportunities to develop, thrive and participate. Let us use this anniversary to inspire a turning point, from where both women and men will work concertedly to make it possible for everybody to use their full potential, irrespective of gender. My hope is that we will, in 25 years, celebrate the International Day of Equality.

Mister Chair,

Equality is not about being similar or doing exactly the same things. So what is gender equality then? Gender Equality means that all human beings are free to develop their abilities and make choices without limitations set by strict gender roles.

First of all, all people have a right to be treated equally and to live their lives free from discrimination.

Secondly, equality is not just important to us as individuals. It is also essential to our wellbeing as a society. Strong communities are ones where everyone feels they have a voice and can make a difference.

Thirdly, equal opportunity is vital to our prosperity. It is central to building strong, viable economies that benefit from the talents of all of its members.

Partly because we lack behind on achieving gender equality and MDG3, we are still far from eradicating poverty globally. And we face many challenges, if we want to achieve the Millennium goals by 2015.

As decision-makers we must play our part. We must build a framework for equality and empowerment within which communities, businesses and individuals can bring about change. Here, education plays a central role. Access for girls and women to primary and further education, coupled with an enabling legal framework for equal access to jobs, can rightly be promoted as the single most important factor for women's empowerment and for building strong economies and inclusive societies.

Mister Chair,

I welcome the emphasis this year on education. Access to education and jobs is essential for empowerment. Still, in many places in the world, ingrained social and cultural practices restrict women's possibilities in the areas of education, which then further reduces their opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.

Denmark puts great emphasis on education of girls and women, boys and men - both nationally and as part of our international cooperation. We see education as the most

essential building block for personal development, for earning a living and for being able to participate in the development of democratic societies. One of the most noble aims of our educational systems is to teach girls and boys mutual respect for each other's worth and capacities.

In many areas of the world, girls are not given the opportunity to influence or choose their own career path. In some, commuting to and from school is unsafe and the school environment is unaccommodating for girls. And all over the world, social and cultural norms generate gender stereotypical educational patterns to the detriment of both women and men. Gender-segregation on the labour market starts with culturally induced limitations on girls' vocational and academic specializations.

In our international cooperation, we place special emphasis on contexts where girls and women are particularly vulnerable, such as Afghanistan. We do not just focus on primary education, but also invest in both skills training and capacity building of women.

Nationally, the challenge is not to ensure enrolment of girls but to make a special effort to improve the rate of boys completing further education, and generally to improve their achievements throughout their schooling. We can also still do more when it comes to broadening young people's educational and vocational choices, thereby easing traditional gender-segregation on the labour market. As men, primarily in unskilled jobs, seem to be the first victims of the financial crisis, we are now initiating policies in order to promote the possibilities of boys and men in education and retrain men to enter the care sector.

Mister Chair,

Education is central for economic growth and development. By ensuring education for girls and boys we are not only doing the right thing for the individual, we are also ensuring our future societies economically and socially. That is why gender equality is a win-win situation for all.

A recent Global Gender Gap Report (2008) concluded that there is a strong correlation between the gender gap and the national competitiveness. And the report sends a clear

and important message to policy makers to incorporate gender equality into their national priorities if they want to maximize their development potential.

Also for this reason, Denmark was very satisfied to see the outcome document of this September's MDG high-level meeting emphasized the importance of women's economic empowerment for achieving the MDGs. Experience shows that women are key drivers of change that they have a multiplier effect and we know that investments in women pay off.

While investing in education, training and capacity building of women, we also believe it is crucial to create an enabling legislative, financial, political and administrative environment that can facilitate women's entrepreneurship.

Denmark will also continue to actively support and promote women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Healthy women provide more and better for their children, families and communities. That is a fact. Women who can plan the timing and number of their children have greater opportunities for education, work and involvement in the development of their society. "Healthy women deliver"; since they – given the opportunity to earn an income - are more likely (than men) to spend their earnings on food, education, medicine and other necessities for the family.

We must all, women as well as men, be part of creating solutions that can lead to sustainable and inclusive societies and economies. Therefore, gender equality must be a key priority in national as well as in international policies and cooperation.

Mister Chair,

100 years after the first celebration of International Women's Day, the Executive Director of UN WOMEN has presented an ambitious 100 day-plan. We should all support the transformation of this vision into reality.

With the establishment of UN Women, all member states gave full political backing to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the UN system. However, this doesn't mean that the rest of the UN system should scale down their current gender and women activities.

The establishment of UN WOMEN promises greatly for the future prospects of achieving gender equality - both within the UN system and at country level. Denmark is fully committed to contributing to the important exercise of transforming the work of UN Women both at its normative and operational levels. We also hope the consolidation of the UN's gender equality efforts will contribute to speeding up progress on both MDG3 and 5.

Madame Chair,

Men and women are partners in building their lives, communities and societies. As parents they make the first, decisive choices about their children's education, thus often forming their path in life. As decision-makers, we create the framework and conditions for equal opportunities – or the opposite – for all. We are approaching 2015 and have only little time left to achieve the Millennium Goals. We must make the right choices that benefit both the individual and the development and prosperity of society.

Thank you!

