



## 94-09-06: Statement of Denmark, H.E. Mrs. Helle Degn

ISO: DNK

\*\*\*\*\*

The electronic preparation of this document has been done by the  
Population Information Network(POPIN) of the United Nations Population  
Division in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme

\*\*\*\*\*

AS WRITTEN

The International Conference  
on Population and Development  
Cairo, 5 - 13 September 1994

Statement by

The Minister for Development Cooperation of D E N M A R K

H.E. Ms. Helle Degn

5 September 1994

Mr. President/Mr. Vice-President, Mr. Secretary-General,  
Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Delegates, Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for all of us that the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt has accepted to preside over this Conference. We are also deeply grateful to the President and to the Government of Egypt for hosting this significant event here in Cairo. I am convinced that this will secure a successful outcome of the Conference. I pledge to you Mr. President]Mr. Vice-President our full support in your efforts to guide the Conference towards this end. Mr. President,

My colleague, the German Federal Minister of the Interior, Mr. Manfred Kanther, speaking on behalf of the European Union, already outlined our basic approach to this Conference. I would like to elaborate upon some issues to which the Government of Denmark attaches particular importance.

The overall theme of the Conference is population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development. This theme reflects the necessity to address the population issues as an integrated part of the wider development problems, such as poverty, poor health conditions and lack of education.

This is a different approach compared to the ones, we applied in Bucharest in 1974 and in Mexico City in 1984. Therefore, the Cairo Conference has the potential of paving a new way in the international debate on how to address population questions world wide.

The challenge - and the opportunity - we as an international community

are facing now is to agree on a new set of directions in the population area as the basis for specific and practical actions. And the aim must be the improvement of the quality of life for the individual.

The nature and scope of population issues vary from region to region, from country to country and from culture to culture. We must recognize these differences. But at the same time we should develop common strategies to address the underlying problems in terms of underdevelopment, poverty, lack of education and health services, and - I have to add - in some cases outright disrespect for women's rights and dignity.

The issue is also seen to include the environmental effects of growing population pressures. It is a complex question. What is important in this context is first of all how we manage our natural resources. We should all try to achieve an environmentally sustainable model of development. The industrialized countries with their consumption and production patterns have the main responsibility for the global environment. This, however, should not be used to discourage efforts to address the environmental impact of mounting population pressures in some of the poorest areas of the World. Although there are obvious financial and ideological constraints we must address the roots of the problems and not merely their symptoms. The traditional family planning programmes can only answer a small part of these problems. The full answer is to apply more comprehensive development strategies. We must reinforce our joint efforts to alleviate poverty and secure everybody and especially the poor, access to essential public services, such as primary health care and education.

Mr. President,

Results presuppose careful preparation. I am pleased that in the preparatory process we have already reached a fair amount of consensus with regard to the basic approach: That population questions are closely related to the wider development issues - nationally as well as internationally.

There also seems to be an emerging understanding that human dignity and the respect for human rights must never be compromised in the development and implementation of population policies. The end never justifies the means.

Mr. President,

It is against this background that I encourage all of us to rid ourselves of the constraints of the traditional concept of family planning and turn towards the concept of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

This concept, which we have consistently advocated throughout the preparatory process, deals with population issues within a broader perspective. It addresses questions that are often neglected in more traditional Family Planning and Mother and Child Health Care programmes: persistently high maternal mortality. The continued spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. The sexual and reproductive health problems of adolescents. Let me add that we all know that many young girls die as a result of early pregnancy and unsafe abortion. It is tragic that this can be seen as one of the results of the silence that often prevails on teenage sexuality.

In most countries there is an increasing awareness of gender issues and of the necessity to increase the status and influence of women at all levels of decisionmaking. At the same time it is necessary to focus much more on the involvement of men and on their responsibilities as sexual partners, fathers and decision-makers .

Programmes for sexual and reproductive health must be integrated into the overall primary health care strategy. And the introduction of this concept must be done in a framework that pays due respect to the rights of couples and individuals .

That includes their right to make free and informed decisions about the number and spacing of their children. A principle we adopted as long ago as in 1974 as part of the Final Document of Bucharest.

Mr. President,

Half a million women - and most of them in developing countries - die every year as a result of pregnancy and birth-related causes. And out of that number 200,000 women die due to unsafe abortions. Many more suffer serious health implications. This figure - 500,000 - is not acceptable. We can change the situation. All it takes is determination to do something about it - and an open mind as to the necessary means.

Most important amongst these means are improved health services, information and education. This also includes the free and affordable access to quality contraceptives for all segments of the population.

We also have to address the painful issue of unsafe abortions which threaten the life and health of so many women. I would like to emphasize

that I fully support the notion that abortion should not be promoted as a method of family planning. But, when a woman herself has made the very difficult decision to have an abortion, she must be given access to safe and legal abortion services. Otherwise, she risks to pay with her life.

Mr. President,

The challenges confronting us are great. Clearly, in our efforts to meet these challenges we must all contribute our part. There is an obvious need to allocate more resources to the population area. And here I find it important to take the broad based approach to population. The greatest part will necessarily remain a national responsibility. But it has to be supported by enhanced international efforts. And efforts in all areas affecting the economic relations between developed and developing countries including development cooperation. Denmark remains committed to these overall international development efforts and contributes more than one percent of our GNP every year in official development assistance. We are among the largest contributors to international organizations involved in population. And our bilateral assistance is targeted directly towards poverty alleviation with more than one third allocated to the social sectors, including health and education.

There is a direct line from the Children's Summit over the Earth Summit and the Human Rights Conference to this Conference on Population and Development. And further on to the Social Summit to be convened next spring in Copenhagen and to the International Women's Conference to be held next summer in Beijing. Together they have set an international agenda which underlines the interlinkages of the problems that we face. And most important - an agenda which seeks to put the individual human

being's dignity, security, and welfare in the centre .

It is with this ambition we engage ourselves in the work at this Conference and with this perspective we will work together with all of you to secure its successful outcome.

Thank you, Mr. President.

---

For further information, please contact: [popin@undp.org](mailto:popin@undp.org)  
POPIN Gopher site: <gopher://gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin>  
POPIN WWW site: <http://www.undp.org/popin>