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**General Assembly  
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Overall review and appraisal of the  
implementation of the  
Programme of Action of the  
International Conference on  
Population and Development**

**June 30 - July 2 1999**

**Statement**

by

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Minister for Development Cooperation  
Denmark**

July 2 1999

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

The Cairo consensus from 1994 ranks among the best examples of the unique quality of the United Nations as a forum for establishing world wide norms for national and international action. The Cairo Programme of Action has clearly set in motion a new approach, which has resulted in widespread progress in the area of population and development. A common agenda and strong commitment from many governments and civil society has helped create a better life for many, young as well as old.

Denmark is especially pleased to see many new initiatives to improve the quality of life of the individual by building on the principles of basic human rights and gender equity. This is an approach we fully believe in.

This Special Session of the General Assembly is a unique opportunity to strengthen and reinforce the Cairo agenda. This **Assembly** should give a strong impetus for renewed and joint efforts to make the Programme of Action of Cairo a living and practical reality.

The Cairo Programme of Action is a very comprehensive document. I would like, therefore, to concentrate on three questions which the Danish Government believes – five years after Cairo - require urgent answers by this Assembly:

The first question is: How do we **meet the growing needs of adolescents?** Some argue that it is the role and responsibility of parents to ensure that adolescents receive the necessary information, **counselling** and health services, that will enable them to make decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health. I agree, parents do have an important role to play.

However, many parents are unable to fulfil this role on their own. The spread of AIDS among the youth, the increasing number of young women that

become pregnant while still in school and the high number of illegal and unsafe abortions is evidence of this. Parents and adolescents both need assistance from the society as a whole – from teachers and health care providers, but also from the authorities for effective protection of their rights.

Studies from Uganda show that adolescents who receive sexual and reproductive information and education are more likely to delay sexual activity and conduct safe sex. They also tend to have fewer sexual partners.

In Denmark and the other Nordic countries the numbers of teen-age pregnancies and the number of STD cases have been reduced significantly through extended provision of sexual education, high quality services and the availability of a wide selection of contraceptive methods. The number of teen-age pregnancies and STD cases in the Nordic countries is now among the lowest in the world. I will not assert that the Nordic approach could just be copied to countries with different cultural and religious beliefs. But I am quite sure that some of the principles behind – such as the respect of the adolescents' own rights – could and should be applied with good results in most countries.

Knowledge is empowerment – and the best way to induce the necessary voluntary behavioural change. In many countries civil society has proven a highly effective vehicle for bringing the messages of the Cairo Programme of Action to adolescents in a way they trust and accept. We believe governments entering into partnership with **NGO's** will find this very rewarding.

Denmark believes it is crucial to make young people our prime target in the future. The sexual and reproductive rights of one billion adolescents neither can nor should be ignored any longer. The far too high number of teenage pregnancies and the frightening increase in the number of young people affected by HIV/AIDS will only be reduced, if we accept the adolescents' needs and respect their rights.

This leads me to the next question: How **do we** effectively fight the spread of AIDS?

AIDS was a problem grossly underestimated in **1994**. We need to strengthen our action in light of developments since Cairo. So far the AIDS virus has infected more than **47** million people and around **14** million have died. World

wide half of all new HIV infections are in young people. Every minute five young people are infected. We consider it a human right to be warned against this deadly infection.

In Sub Saharan Africa teenage girls are disproportionately affected by HIV. Studies in Africa found the rate of infection in teenage girls to be six times higher than in women over 35 years. About one teenage girl in four live with HIV, compared with one in 25 teenage boys. This fact needs our particular attention.

Mr. President, it is high time to acknowledge that youth are sexually active. And **recognise** that their sexual behaviour will be decisive for future population growth as well as for prevention of AIDS and for realising the potentials of social and economic development.

For these reasons alone, governments – with the support of the international community – must urgently redouble efforts to combat the spread of AIDS. And governments must give special priority to improving the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents and of young women in particular. Direct and clear information campaigns are a necessary first step.

My third question is How can we reduce the all to high maternal mortality? More than half a million women died in **1998** from maternal mortality and many more suffer from permanent injuries after complicated pregnancies. For a number of years we have failed to make sufficient progress in this area although the means clearly are available. Denmark believes it is necessary to strengthen our efforts and to make use of **the** lessons learned.

It is not enough to improve women's and men's knowledge and their access to family planning services. The availability of qualified midwives in the rural areas is equally essential. And they have to be supported by adequate means of transportation, supplies and equipment.

The problem of maternal mortality is closely related to women's general living conditions. If we succeed in reducing inequalities between men and women, I feel sure maternal mortality would also decline. And if more young girls attend school, and are allowed to remain in school, even if they get

pregnant, I am sure this would have a significant positive effect on maternal mortality.

A stronger involvement of men is clearly needed. I am therefore happy to see that this very important aspect has been stressed in the recommendations for key future actions. I hope it will be followed up by concrete initiatives at country level.

Insufficient financial resources continue to be an important obstacle. To reach the goals of Cairo, both donor countries and developing countries will need to mobilise new and substantial resources in favour of population programmes. Since population assistance is broad based these efforts must, however, go hand in hand with a new commitment to attain the agreed ODA target of 0.7 per cent of GDP.

Given the fact that resources are scarce – and are likely to remain so - they need to be well targeted. Donors should give priority to the poorest countries and governments to the poor and most vulnerable people within their countries. This is not only fair, but it is necessary since reproductive health problems are far bigger among the poorer sections of society – often women who have not learned how to read and write.

Since the Cairo Conference Denmark has increased its development assistance for population activities considerably. Our assistance is primarily given through UNFPA and other relevant UN-agencies. Assistance is also provided to many of Denmark's closest bilateral partners among the developing countries through sector programme support in the area of health and education. We try to integrate reproductive health in all relevant sector programmes. Our experience so far has been positive.

In conclusion, I wish to stress that Denmark is, and will continue to be a strong advocate and supporter of the principles and goals of the Cairo Programme of Action. We remain strongly committed in our development assistance – bilateral as well as multilateral - to further make the Programme of Action of Cairo a practical reality.

Thank you Mr. President.

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