

Speech for the CEDAW examination

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee

It is always with great respect that I enter the UN Building. To me, it represents the finest of international cooperation.

I am pleased to have the opportunity today to explain how Denmark translates the international obligations in the CEDAW into specific activities and legislation.

It is a privilege to have so many competent experts critically addressing Denmark's gender equality initiatives. We can only learn from this experience.

We believe that we have come a long part of the way to both formal and real gender equality. But many challenges and tasks obviously still lie ahead.

Greenland and the Faroe Islands have not been able to participate today, but they have contributed to this introduction, and I will be reading their text. Since both Greenland and the Faroe Islands are autonomous, I can not speak further regarding concrete activities on gender equality policies and legislation on their behalf.

Madam Chair

In Denmark, gender equality and women's equal rights are fundamental values. We cannot imagine a democratic society without gender equality. And we know that gender equality and women's full participation in society and the labour market are conditions for economic growth.

Our minister for gender equality is an avowed feminist. Gender equality is often up for discussion in the Danish parliament, and we carry on an excellent dialogue with the NGOs.

The legislation in terms of formal gender equality is in place, and the government regularly takes steps to ensure that Danish legislation and practice reflect the intentions of CEDAW. Moreover, the convention is a relevant and applied source of law in Denmark.

Madam Chair

Our name act, for instance, is a symbol of gender equality. We have abolished the concept of married name, and men and women – spouses and registered partners – are free to choose whether they want

to keep their own surnames or to take their husband's or wife's surname.

The Danish Act on Gender Equality is improved on an ongoing basis. The latest amendment was passed just this spring. The government took the initiative in expanding the act's rules on the gender composition of boards and committees appointed by ministers. These rules now also apply to boards appointed by local and regional authorities.

The Danish parliament has just passed an amendment to the Danish Act on Equal Pay, ordering large companies to compile gender-segregated pay statistics for themselves.

The legislation on equal treatment in the labour market was tightened in December 2005. Now the act on equal treatment in the labour market stipulates that sexual harassment and bullying is an act of discrimination. The rules on compensation were also improved.

If people are of the opinion that they have been discriminated against on account of gender, they can file a complaint with the Gender Equality Board. This is free of charge, and the board may award compensation to the person being discriminated.

Madam Chair

Danish gender equality work applies a two-pronged approach – this means that we apply the gender mainstreaming strategy at the same time as we launch special initiatives. The gender mainstreaming work enjoys high priority and is described in detail in our report and our answers to the Committee's list of issues.

A brief description of the results of Denmark's gender quality work indicates a society where:

- The educational level is high – and girls attain a higher level of education than boys.
- Men and women are at large equally active in the labour market. Women account for 47.5 percent of the labour force.
- Women enjoy a high employment rate of 69.3 percent and – by European standards – a high fertility rate of 1.8 children per woman.
- We have a long and flexible parental leave scheme of 52 weeks. The first 14 weeks protect motherhood and are thus reserved for the mother, whereas the remaining weeks may be shared by the mother and father on an equal basis.
- We make an effort to try and enable both men and women to reconcile working life and family life. Financial compensation

from the state is awarded during parental leave and many companies allow full wages during the leave. For this reason we have just introduced a maternity/paternity cover fund which offsets employers' pay costs during leave. In this way, the costs of parental leave are divided more equally between workplaces with many male employees and workplaces with many female employees.

- And then we have guaranteed day care for all children above the age of 30 weeks and a ceiling of 25 percent of the expenses payable by parents for public day care. If you have a tight budget – for instance as a single mother – prices may be reduced further.
- Finally, the public sector has to care for older people who cannot manage on their own. So this is not a burden to be borne by the woman in the family.

So far so good, but we are still faced with a number of challenges.

Our sixth report explains the gender equality problems that the government is trying to better by means of a large number of special initiatives.

As regards article 5, I would like to point out the attitude readjustment campaigns completed for boys and girls and the rights campaign just completed for migrant women.

We have arranged annual conferences for the past three years for and with young people and have prepared discussion materials on gender equality for older school children. We have focused on a new theme every year: gender and health, gender and violence, gender and pornofication, and gender and the choice of education and occupation. Regarding the last theme, we have prepared a very comprehensive interactive web-based material on the gender-determined choice of education. It is intended for parents, teachers and pupils and are aimed at persuading boys and girls to make more unorthodox choices of education (as regards to article 10).

The reason behind is that the Danish labour market remains highly gender segregated. To diminish the segregation, we have mapped out the gender-segregated labour market, and an inter-ministerial working group announced a number of specific recommendations this spring. They will be followed up by directions for companies and by educational and labour market policies. Individuals must have a free choice of education and occupation without being limited by old conventions.

The free choice applies to everyone regardless of ethnic origin. For this reason the Danish government also focuses on migrant women.

Migrant women's employment rate is only 40 percent, which is very low compared to Danish women. At the same time, female migrants in the age of 16 to 19 have a low representation in the different youth educations. The same pattern appears when it comes to participating in free time organisations – only 6 to 12 percent female migrants take part in sports clubs compared to 30 to 38 percent of male migrants. Tradition, culture, family patterns and the lack of Danish skills are some of the barriers migrant women face, and it results in a lack of contact to the labour market as well as the educational system.

In December 2005, the Danish government published a four-year action plan "*Employment, participation and equal opportunities for all*".

This action plan is to contribute to breaking the gender-role patterns and gender-linked prejudices existing for women and men, boys and girls in relation to the labour market, the educational system and associations. The action plan consists of more than 50 specific initiatives, including debates with men with non-Danish ethnic backgrounds about gender roles and family rights, special efforts targeted at long-term unemployed young women with non-Danish ethnic backgrounds, and preparation of material on gender and cultural understanding to volunteers in associations.

I will also briefly mention our campaign about gender equality and rights arranged at the language schools. We gathered women for theme-days on women's rights, and we informed them of their sexual and reproductive rights, but also rights in relation to ones own finances, divorce and the free choice of spouse.

And then we have planned a campaign aiming at men this autumn. We have established that certain families of non-Danish ethnicity live with very patriarchal family patterns, which makes it difficult for especially women to take an active part in society. We want to open a dialogue with these groups on this subject as this is not acceptable.

Gender equality is a fundamental right in Denmark, and it applies to everyone.

The government has also focused on forced marriages, and an action plan on this was launched in 2003. The plan consists of 21 initiatives promoting information and dialogue, counselling, girls only clubs, housing, research and documentation. The government is aware that

forced marriages are a serious problem, and that a constant focus is needed.

Madam Chair

Trafficking and prostitution, as regards to article 6, are issues high on the Danish agenda. As the rest of the world, Denmark experiences the flip side of globalisation, which is trafficking in women for prostitution. Trafficking is completely unacceptable and the government is devoted to eliminating this modern form of slavery. For the past three years, we have been working on implementing an action plan with the prime objectives of preventing trafficking and supporting victims. We have hotlines, street outreach workers, shelters and cooperation between NGOs and the police. The Danish police have hired an anthropologist to act as bridge builder in relation to social activities, and in connection with raids, the police always bring representatives from the social organisations to speak with the women and explain the possibilities of living at protected shelters while their return to their home countries is being prepared. You have received our action plan on trafficking in women, which describes several activities in addition to those I have mentioned.

The government has also launched two consecutive action plans to fight men's violence against women, which is a quite widespread phenomenon. The latest plan calls for improving the support of victims of violence and the treatment of the abusive man. I cannot give a full account of its contents because of the time limit, but I would like to encourage the members of the committee to study the action plan. I would like you to note that the action plan places special focus on violence against migrant women. They make out a very vulnerable group that needs a set of specific activities which take into account their situation. Some of these activities are: a campaign on their rights including a short film, the establishment of a network of migrant women who have suffered domestic violence and the training of crisis centre personnel, so they know which special needs are required.

Madam Chair

Time is short and I will therefore dedicate the rest of my speech to informing you about the activities to promote women in management and equal pay.

In accordance with article 7, it is crucial that women participate in the political decision-making process.

37 percent of the members of the Danish Parliament are women, while only 27 percent of the members of local councils are women. Denmark has recently implemented a far-reaching local government reform, which will merge a large number of municipals. This has obviously resulted in some fighting for seats. Consequently, the Minister for Gender Equality contacted the local party associations before the election and encouraged them to put more women on the ballots. At the same time, material providing good examples and offering advice to both party associations and women was distributed via for instance libraries. This preventive action meant that the number of women in local councils increased slightly, however, the percentage of female mayors still dropped from 9 percent to 7 percent. As a follow-up, checklists have been sent to the committees preparing the mergers of the local governments.

Two related problems are the share of women in management and in academia.

A slightly higher percentage of Danish women than men take an education – it is therefore surprising to see that not more women are represented in top positions. If you want to get the best brains, you obviously need some more women.

Indeed, a study prepared on the initiative of the Minister for Gender Equality shows that more women in the top position in the companies resulted in better bottom-line results. This argument has now been acknowledged by trade and industry, and we are seeing the results of the Minister for Gender Equality's myriad of initiatives in the area, which have been described in the report and in the answers to the list of issues (as regards article 11).

The government has also focused on increasing the number of women in top university positions where we have seen an uneven distribution of women and men.

When Danish women apply for research positions, they get them as often as men do. Thus, women are not disqualified because of poor qualifications or due to their sex. Women simply do not apply for senior lectureships or professorships to the same extent as men. As in a broad number of other European countries, women drop out the higher up in the hierarchy they move.

Denmark has a lot of qualified women. Half of all students are women, and in some training programmes, more than half the students are women. Since the future calls for more researchers and researchers who measure up to the best in the world, it is imperative that Denmark realises the potential for female researchers.

Consequently, the government established the think-tank “All talents in use – more women in research” in autumn 2004. The outcome of the think-tank’s work is a number of recommendations for the universities – for example in the form of a toolbox filled with management instruments for promoting, retaining and recruiting female talents. The recommendations for politicians include earmarking money for an initiative to cultivate young female talents. Until 2008, the Danish government will thus earmark DKK 45 million for a research programme for young female researchers in science and technology.

But one thing is equal access to jobs; another is getting the same pay for the job.

Women and men rarely get the same pay even if they perform the same job in a company. The gender-segregated labour market is one of the main reasons for the difference in men's and women's pay. Other reasons are differences in length of service, training, etc. However, there is a 3-7 percent gap that no one can explain.

The government monitors this pay gap very closely. As mentioned earlier, the Danish Act on Equal Pay has recently been extended to include an obligation for large companies to compile gender-segregated payroll statistics. Furthermore, the government and the social partners are putting the finishing touches on a guide to the companies.

Madam Chair

As mentioned earlier I would now like to read the contribution from Greenland on behalf of my colleagues in the North.

GRØNLANDSK BIDRAG SÆTTES IND HER

Madam Chair

In conclusion, I hope that my introductory speech, Denmark’s sixth periodic report and the answers to the committee’s list of issues have drawn a picture of Denmark’s efforts to promote equality between men and women, and I look forward to a constructive and interesting dialogue with the committee.