

## **Speaking notes – Minister for Equal Opportunities**

Your Royal Highness, Madame Deputy Secretary General, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour for me to represent the Danish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at this important conference, and I want to thank the Council of Europe for organizing this joint event.

I also want to welcome ministerial colleagues as well as all the speakers from different parts of the world for coming all the way to Denmark to participate.

Gender equality is at the heart of the Danish Chairmanship and I am thrilled that so many of you are here to discuss how we can ensure equal opportunities for all in the future.

We are gathered here today and tomorrow because we have signed up for a new strategy on gender equality.

We must be proud. Proud that we share a common vision on how to improve equality for the 820 million citizens of Europe.

This strategy is not just words on paper; this strategy has the potential to directly change the lives;

- Of women who want to use their talent and skills in politics and decision-making

- Of women who aren't safe in their own homes because of a violent spouse
- Of refugee women who are raped and violated on their escape from war and terror
- Of girls who have their lives ruined because their private photos have been shared online

Equality and equal opportunities aren't just a matter of principles. It is a matter of lives lived by women and men, girls and boys - and it can be a matter of life and death.

The strategy also touch upon the role of men.

I truly believe that a modern and relevant gender equality approach must include men.

Men are needed both as partners for the empowerment of women and as beneficiaries of gender equality in their own right.

If implemented, this strategy will become a win-win for all. And THAT is the true power of our new commitments.

Gender equality is a priority of the Danish Chairmanship.

It is a cornerstone of Danish society because we truly believe that equality is key to realizing human rights, economic growth and sustainable development.

And human rights apply to all – regardless of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Our new strategy is a powerful tool for all member states to continue to progress equal opportunities, and the 6 strategic objectives point out the main challenges on our way towards this goal.

Today and tomorrow, you will be discussing how to proceed.

You will be focusing on 3 main topics from the strategy, and let me briefly touch on these;

First:

There is a lack of women in politics as well as public management in all our countries.

Achieving balanced representation of men and women in decision-making is therefore crucial. It is crucial because women and men must have equal opportunities in their choice of jobs and careers and it is crucial because we need to make use of all talents and competences in society.

When promoting more women in these fields we must understand how gender stereotypical career choices and unconscious bias determine the recruitment process.

We also need to provide conditions that allow men to take on an equal role as caregivers in their families – in order for women to be able to pursue a career on the same footing as men. This includes access to parental leave.

Second:

The #MeToo movement is a wakeup call for all of us. We were all aware that sexist sentiments and behaviors were prevalent in many spheres and all our societies. But the extent of it has astounded us on a global level.

Sexism is closely connected to gender stereotypes because it originates in how we perceive each other and how we connect to each other.

Worst case scenario implies that sexism in a very concrete way can risk limiting the free choice of the individual and maintain girls and boys, women and men in traditional roles and jobs.

Especially young girls are at risk online where they are subject to harassment and bullying. We owe it to our daughters and sons to promote respect, equality and dignity between girls and boys.

We need capacity building to be able to detect and investigate cases of sexism and sexual harassment wherever they occur – including online.

Third:

We have to uphold and protect the human rights of all refugee women and asylum seekers. We must promote a gender equality perspective in our policies and programs in dealing with these groups of extremely vulnerable women.

And we have to combat negative social control in migrant communities in countries of destination. Culture and religion can never be an acceptable excuse for violating the rights of women and girls.

In conclusion;

We must ensure that our new strategy continues to guide our future cooperation.

The key is implementation. We must move forward from words to action!  
We must transform visions to activities in order to ensure real change.

The strategy delivers a strong framework for concrete activities and priorities in order to ensure equal opportunities for the millions of citizens in all our member states.

Let's promise each other to share the responsibility of implementing the strategy, as well as the Istanbul Convention - the gold standard for combatting violence against women.

Let's strengthen our efforts in the future – to make use of all talents, and to create a better future for the millions of battered women, for refugee women, and for our daughters who shouldn't fear harassment on and off-line.

Together we are strong – together we can make a difference.

Thank you.