

Speech of Søren Pind, Minister for Development Cooperation, at reception for the diplomatic corps

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Distinguished Ambassadors and Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As our Foreign Minister did, I would like to bid you a warm welcome. I am also very happy to be here today – maybe even slightly happier than our Foreign Minister.

While Lene has been a minister since the Government took office in 2001, I only have 25 days experience in this field. It has been 25 very gratifying days. And it has also been a humbling experience to suddenly be in charge of a portfolio of 15 billion kroner and part of a global effort affecting the lives of millions of people.

I have sometimes been labelled the lonesome cowboy or my party's "enfant terrible". Nothing could be more unfair. I am 40 years old – at least they could have the common decency to call me an "adult terrible". My first days in office have, however, reminded me that the word "minister" is derived from Latin and means "servant". Being a servant requires a certain amount of humility which I am quickly acquiring in view of the challenges facing us.

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Everybody here present today is a partner in development – either as a long-standing donor, an emerging one or as a partner country. It is a true privilege for me to meet you today and I hope we can have an open and frank debate. But – as President Ronald Reagan said – "before I refuse to take your questions, I have an opening statement."

Like our Foreign Minister, I have a message of continuity today. But I also have a message of change in Danish development policy.

On my first day in office, I held a speech for my new colleagues in the Ministry. I told them that they were doing the noblest of jobs because they were essentially in the business of promoting freedom. I told them that development cooperation is ultimately about setting people free – about enabling people to be masters of their own destiny and enabling them to lead healthy, productive lives of their own choice.

A decade ago, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen wrote a book called "Development as Freedom". He sees freedom as a precondition for development. But freedom alone does not guarantee development. To be free also means having the necessary capacity and skill to grab the opportunities that freedom provides. Development to me is about individuals, families and communities realizing their potential, increasing their choices and enjoying the freedom to live their lives as they choose.

I have today launched a public hearing of the Government's new draft strategy for Danish development cooperation. We expect the strategy process to be completed in May this year. The strategy emphasises freedom both as an end in itself and as a means to development.

In the new strategy, we set out five priorities for our development work in the years to come. I have already indirectly touched upon two priorities: The promotion of democracy and of market-based economic growth as essential elements in development and poverty eradication.

20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is clear that we are not at the End of History. I am not sure that we are – as the scholar Robert Kagan has slightly teasingly labelled it – facing the “The Return of History and the End of Dreams.” But we do live in times of turmoil and the need to promote core principles, values and rights has not diminished.

Danish development policy is a central part of an active Danish foreign and security policy. It is an equal and independent element in our global engagement. Our Foreign Minister mentioned in her speech the Danish soldiers in Helmand and warships in the Gulf of Aden. These efforts go hand in hand with our support to girls’ education in Afghanistan and humanitarian and development efforts on the Horn of Africa. Development is fundamentally about eradicating poverty, but it is also about projecting soft power and winning hearts and minds. And it is an important part of Denmark’s image abroad as a decent and benevolent nation.

Therefore, I am very pleased that the Danish government has just recently – despite the economic crisis – decided to maintain Denmark’s high level of ODA for the years to come. All donors must deliver on their promises. It is essential for our credibility that the international community lives up to its ODA commitments.

Permit me to briefly touch upon the five priorities set out in the strategy. First, we will enhance our efforts to promote freedom, democracy and human rights. Secondly, we will significantly strengthen our support for market-driven economic growth and job creation. Thirdly, we will continue to drive the gender equality agenda. Fourthly, fragile states will figure much more prominently in our development cooperation. And, finally, environment and climate change will be high on our development agenda. Let me elaborate a little further on these five strategic priorities.

Freedom, democracy and human rights are fundamental values in their own right. And I believe they are a precondition for sustainable development. Poverty and hunger do not thrive in open societies where citizens can take active part in the political process, choose their leaders and hold them accountable. And instability and conflict have poor living conditions in pluralistic societies based on dialogue, free speech and the rule of law. Three days after taking office, I visited Zimbabwe. There, I clearly witnessed how a lack of democracy and good governance tears a society apart and stands squarely in the way of development. In our development cooperation, we will work with partners to strengthen democratic institutions, protect fundamental human rights, fortify institutions of good governance and fight corruption. Denmark will strengthen its efforts in international fora to promote these values. In partner countries, we will work with governments, parliaments, and civil society to ensure democratic ownership and a public sector that effectively delivers the services that citizens rightfully demand.

Market-driven economic growth and job creation is a sine qua non for sustained poverty reduction and for reaching the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. Ever since the birth of Civilisation, individuals, communities and nations have built their wealth on private initiative, entrepreneurship and trade. Every year, millions of young people in developing countries enter labour markets that do not offer enough jobs. That means limited opportunities for young people to unfold their skills and drive to make a living for themselves and their families. This is a terrible waste of human potential. And it is a cause for discontent and instability. The proportion of Danish ODA allocated to private sector led growth will increase over the coming years with a

particular focus on Africa. We shall work for free trade and market access; support better framework conditions for private initiative in partner countries; help strengthen access to energy, technology and innovation; support small and medium enterprises as important engines of growth; and focus more on vocational training.

As a third priority in our new strategy, we will continue to put gender equality and women's rights and opportunities at the top of the international agenda. Promoting equal freedoms, rights and opportunities for men and women is a fundamental value. And liberating the resources that women possess is key to development and achieving the MDGs. In particular, we will focus on women's economic rights and possibilities and their access to and active participation in politics. Access to education for women will be another priority area as will women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

A fourth priority will be to increase our engagement in fragile and conflict-ridden regions and states. One third of the world's poorest people live in countries, where the state has little or no legitimacy. Stability and security are necessary for development. A stronger focus on fragile states in our humanitarian, reconstruction and development efforts will also require increased willingness to take risks. We are ready to do that to achieve our goals.

Finally, as a fifth priority, we will sustain our efforts to promote environmentally sustainable development and combat climate change and its consequences. Denmark will provide its fair share of fast start financing amounting to approximately 225 million USD. And we will maintain our strong focus and leading role on climate adaptation.

Enough about the priority areas in the new strategy. As Sir Winston Churchill once said: "However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results." Churchill was a very sensible man and I think we should all follow that piece of advice in our development efforts. With our partners, we will strengthen the monitoring of results to ensure maximum impact of our interventions.

Keeping up aid volumes is essential for reaching the MDGs. But quantity only matters if the quality is right. We must all work closely together to enhance aid effectiveness. We owe that to the tax payers and not least to the end beneficiaries.

Denmark will seek to remain at the forefront of the aid effectiveness agenda. To me, that means an increased focus in our development efforts and an effective division of labour. It means that we must look at our comparative advantages and that we don't shy away from tough choices. Needs in developing countries are infinite, but resources are scarce. We should focus our efforts where the chances of making a lasting difference are the greatest. Denmark remains firmly committed to the principles of aid effectiveness. Bilaterally, we will confine our development cooperation to fewer partners and we will be present in fewer sectors in each country. Our cooperation will be stronger and our interventions will carry more weight where we are present. Multilaterally, the same will apply – we will work with fewer organizations where we will have a stronger voice and stronger impact.

Wishing to do the Good is noble and right. But in development cooperation there is also the principle of "do no harm." We should always make sure that development interventions help free people from poverty and oppression. And that our common efforts do not – unintentionally – contribute to keeping people in poverty and lack of freedom. When hunger hits a country, our immediate reaction is to rush in and help. But we also need to take a longer-term perspective. When a house catches fire for the first time, you call the fire brigade. You probably do the same

thing, if a new fire erupts. But when a house has caught fire for the tenth time, you start reflecting. Is there something basically wrong with the structure of the house that needs to be changed? Or should we vacate the house and construct a new one? I think there is a good case for continuously rethinking our development efforts, learn from our successes and mistakes and always have the long-term goal in mind.

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In my introductory remarks, I said that I was very happy to be here today. And I am. But I wish we were not here addressing issues of poverty, oppression, and lack of opportunity. I firmly believe that our ultimate aim as partners in development is to make ourselves obsolete. I look forward to working closely with all of you towards that end.

Thank you