

Opening remarks – ICMEO

[The spoken word might slightly diverge from the written word]

Thank you, and thanks to the Estonian organizers for inviting me to open this conference as part of the Danish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The way I see it, it's actually quite simple;

If we want to achieve a gender equal society - we must involve men and boys!

There are basically two equally important perspectives if we truly want to involve men;

First of all, Men and boys have to be partners in promoting women's empowerment. They have to support the end of discrimination of women.

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Secondly, we have to acknowledge that men and boys have their own gender equality challenges. Men and boys must also benefit from increased equal opportunities; hence, we need to target initiatives directly at men.

For some, this might sound provocative! Can we look at men's problems, whilst women still face the majority of discrimination around the world?

My answer is a clear YES!

Including men and men's problems doesn't mean that we shy away from focusing on women and women's problems.

It does mean, however, that we take the first steps towards a modern policy on gender equality.



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Because promoting equality for both men and women is a win-win;

- Women and men will benefit from a higher degree of gender equality and equal opportunities
- Our Nordic-Baltic societies will gain economically and the level of coherence in our societies will increase.

For these reasons, I have decided to place men and gender equality high on the agenda in Denmark as well as during our Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

For example; I am dedicated to promoting more men to take parental leave and to include more men into caregiving. I am also introducing a bill to ensure that digital communication from public authorities regarding children goes to both fathers and mothers. I believe they will be more



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likely to share the responsibility for the childcare if they both receive the same information.

We also need to consider other important gender issues for men and boys, such as their physical and mental health, and how we can support boys in the educational system. And last but not least, we need to include *young* men as well as women into the discussions on gender equality.

Denmark as the Presidency of Nordic Council of Ministers has also supported our Estonian colleagues for this ICMEO conference as well as an international Barbershop event next month in Latvia.

I am sure, that our common efforts will have a profound effect. We will be able to mobilize men and include them into our discussions – like today.



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But we won't be able to include all men!

And why not?

Well, we are seeing a backlash to gender equality and a growing resistance across Europe and across the World against women's empowerment.

It seems that not all men are happy about moving towards more gender equality.

Some younger men feel a sense of loss of privilege. Their traditional masculinity is under pressure. They feel left behind.

And they are increasingly teaming up online. They meet in a resistance against women's rights and feminism – the so-called Manospheres.



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In October, we will publish a Nordic report describing the Manosphere, and we will present and discuss the report at an international conference in November in Copenhagen.

The report will look at how widespread the Manosphere is in the Nordic countries and how the debate in these forums influence the attitudes towards gender equality in general.

Most of these young men mainly get angry and agitated. But some men are at risk of being radicalized, and we have seen violence and death in the wake of this.

We need to develop a better understanding of this phenomenon.

We need to prevent young men from being mobilized into these online groups that are



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working against gender equality and women's rights.

And we need to define and promote a modern and diverse masculinity that includes all men.

You can hear much more about this later on today when the Danish expert behind our report opens a panel.

In conclusion; It won't be easy to rethink our gender equality policies to include both women and men. But there is no way around it, we have to move forward.

Only by including men can we truly establish a modern gender equal society.

And only by opening up for a dialogue embracing also the angry young men – can we seek to involve all men into the discussions.



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I wish you a very interesting and fruitful two days here in Tallinn or online.

I am very impressed by how the organizers have overcome the challenges in these difficult times of Covid-19.

The Nordic-Baltic region is closely knit together – we call it the Nordic-Baltic Eight, and when it comes to gender equality and equal opportunities, we have a lot in common and a lot to learn from each other.

And I am sure you will come up with interesting solutions and perspectives on how we can involve men and their specific problems into a modern policy, as well as how we can overcome the current backlash on gender equality.

Have a great conference!