

**Welcoming speech of respectively the Danish Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and the acting Danish Minister of Health, at the conference “Combating Antimicrobial resistance – Time for Joint Action”**

Copenhagen, 14 March 2012

**Minister Mette Gjerskov:**

Your Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have so been looking forward to this conference, because what we are here to discuss over the next two days, is a key priority for the Danish Presidency and me as the Danish minister for Food.

•

Antimicrobial resistance is one of the most important challenges facing us, and it will likely be on the agenda for many years to come. People are actually dying out there.

If we want to meet this challenge, we cannot afford to wait any longer. We need to act now.

It is time to take action! – Joint action

And the Danish Presidency will do its utmost to make this happen.

•

Infectious bacteria are a continuous menace to us humans, because they play by their own rules.

They ignore borders, bureaucracy and politics. They don't care about nationality and they possess an impressive talent for adaption.

They challenge our immune systems as well as our governmental systems.

It is an issue which concerns all of Europe – in fact, it concerns the whole world – and it can therefore only be solved on an international level.

•

For far too long we have been using excessive amounts of antibiotics in Europe and the rest of the world.

This overuse has begun to blunt our most important weapon against bacterial diseases.

As Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, I am mainly focused on the use of antibiotics in the animal production.

•

But as I mentioned before, resistant bacteria do not respect borders and can certainly not be confined to one sector alone.

Antimicrobial resistance is a serious problem in the human healthcare sector as well as the agricultural sector.

It therefore seems appropriate that we should look to both these sectors for solutions.

•

In the Nordic countries we have tried to do just that.

Using the ‘One Health’ approach, we have cooperated across countries and sectors in order to broadly gather information on resistance development and thereby we have sought to create a platform from which to develop possible means of preventing the further spread of resistant bacteria.

•

The Commission has with its action plan from November 2011 chosen a similar and ambitious route.

This action plan will serve as a foundation for the EU member states to build on with national initiatives that serve to meet the challenges in front of us, and the Danish Presidency fully supports the action plan.

•

In line with this, the conference has its focus on three main areas:

- Surveillance and collection of comparable data for the use of antibiotics and antimicrobial resistance,
- stopping the overuse of antibiotics
- and reducing the use of the critically important antibiotics.

•

Another challenge is that the development of new effective antibiotics has not kept pace with the development of the resistant bacteria.

The Presidency fully supports the work of – amongst others – the EU-Commission in promoting action and cooperation in the development of new antibiotics.

At the same time (as I mentioned before) it is immensely important to preserve the effectiveness of existing antibiotics and reduce further development and spread of resistance.

•

The ‘One Health’ approach, calls for us to communicate, share and cooperate and it is crucial that everyone contributes with knowledge from their specific area of expertise.

Only through cooperation and joint action may we find the best solutions and ensure that we also in future may rely on antibiotics for treatment against infections.

•

And with these words, I would like to welcome you all to this conference and thank you all for coming.

It is of great significance that so many Member States, organisations and institutions are represented here today.

•

So I will encourage you all to please talk, share and learn from one another. I hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to seek and discuss effective solutions to the problems we face. I urge you all to take joint action!

And now I will give the floor to my esteemed colleague, the Danish Minister for Health, Ms. Pia Olsen Dyhr.

**Minister Pia Olsen Dyhr:**

Thank you...and once again a warm welcome to everyone.

It is very pleasing to see so many people from all over Europe who have taken the time to come to Copenhagen and discuss this important subject with us over the next two days.

•

As Her Royal Highness highlighted, antimicrobial resistance is a huge threat to human health and as Minister for Health, I am deeply concerned.

Action now is absolutely necessary.

•

This is why, we have chosen the title: “*Combating Antimicrobial resistance - Time for Joint Action*” for this conference.

The title underlines both the ‘One Health’ perspective and stresses the need for a common approach.

Antimicrobial resistance is an escalating problem throughout the EU and beyond.

The purpose of this conference is to further raise awareness to this issue and for the next to days to create a forum in which we across Europe may seek to find durable solutions.

•

We have a fairly tight schedule with many speakers addressing different aspects of the challenges of antimicrobial resistance.

It is our hope and ambition that these experts in the field of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) will lend inspiration to the further discussions during this conference and indeed beyond.

•

We will amongst others be listening to presentations from the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Centre for Disease and Prevention Control (ECDC) and the European Commission.

And from a broad array of experts we will be given the opportunity to learn about best practices, and examples of how different Member States and sectors have dealt with antimicrobials and resistance.

•

Tomorrow workshops have been arranged, each dealing with specific focal areas to the antimicrobial threat.

The topics reflect our main priorities, which are:

- To stop the overuse of antibiotics with focus on rational use
- To reduce the use of critically important antibiotics
- And finally to strengthen surveillance and secure collection of comparable data of antimicrobial resistance and consumption

Our aim with the workshops is to give you an opportunity to exchange thoughts and ideas on which actions might be feasible in terms of addressing certain antimicrobial challenges.

•

As co-host for the conference, I will encourage each of you to take an active part in the workshop discussions tomorrow.

Hopefully we may all return home with many good ideas for further development and implementation at national and/or European level.

•

In addition, the Danish Presidency hopes that Council Conclusions on this important issue may be adopted in June 2012.

•

Finally, I would like to thank you all for coming and supporting this conference. I hope that you may enjoy these next two days in Copenhagen and in each others company.

I am confident, that we by the end of this conference we will have taken a great step in our fight against antimicrobial resistance.

Thank you!