



REGERINGSKANSLIET

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF SWEDEN
BY MR. PER OLSSON FRIDH**

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
UNITED NATIONS
GENEVA**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Dear NGO representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The seventh periodic report of the Government of Sweden was submitted to the Committee on 30 April 2015 under the new procedure with a list of issues prior to reporting. We would like to thank the Committee for the list of issues and for welcoming us to Geneva today.

First, let me introduce my colleagues:

Jenny Olausson, Deputy Director-General, Ministry of Culture
Johanna Peyron, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Justice
Henrik Sjölander, Deputy Director, Ministry of Justice
Johanna van Rooij, Legal Adviser, Ministry of Justice
Karin Stenson, Desk Officer, Ministry of Culture
Emelie Lindahl, Desk Officer, Ministry of Culture
Erik Adell Hellström, Desk Officer, Ministry of Culture
Kerstin Evelius, National Coordinator Mental Health, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
Karin Bengtson, Desk Officer, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
Annika Remaeus, Desk Officer, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
Hanna Zeland, Deputy Director, Ministry of Employment

Let me begin by re-affirming the commitment of the Government of Sweden to ensure full respect of its international human rights obligations. However, challenges remain before Sweden can comply fully and completely with its convention commitments on human rights.

The promotion and protection of human rights is one of the Government's most important tasks and also constitutes a cornerstone in Swedish foreign policy.

The new goal for the Government policy on human rights is to ensure full respect for Sweden's international obligations on human rights. It will form the basis upon which the future systematic work on human rights in Sweden will rely upon. This was recently adopted by the Parliament.

In order to further strengthen the systematic work for human rights in Sweden the Government will deliver to Parliament a strategy for the systematic work for human rights in Sweden. One important part of the forthcoming strategy is the proposal to Parliament to establish an

independent national human rights institution in conformity with the Paris Principles.

As a part of the Government's efforts to promote and protect the rights of the child, the Government has initiated the process of incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Swedish legislation. A public inquiry has been set up in order to propose a law on the incorporation of the Convention. The inquiry is planned to submit its results to the Government today, 9th of March.

A new Disability Policy will be effected in 2017.

Furthermore, last year Sweden adopted a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, as the 6th country in the world. It is developed in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and clearly states that the government expects companies operating in Sweden or abroad to respect human rights in all their activities. The Action Plan is part of the government's more ambitious policy on responsible business.

Mr Chair,

The Government reiterates its commitment to further advance the opportunities of the Sami people - to protect and develop the Sami culture and society and to strengthen the Sami right to self-determination, in accordance with the status as an indigenous people. As a consequence the Government intends to further increase the ambitions within this policy area, for example by strengthening Sami influence and participation.

Furthermore, in accordance with Sweden's statement to the Human Rights Council, the Government will work towards a ratification of ILO Convention 169. However, a decision to accede to a convention is ultimately a matter for the Swedish Parliament.

To secure the rights of the national minorities is an undertaking that the Government has set out to fulfil. Long term results can only be achieved through close cooperation between agencies, local councils and the national minorities themselves and is at the heart of the measures that the Government is taking. The Government is currently preparing a review of the Act on National Minorities and National Minority Languages.

Ensuring the human rights of Roma continues to be a priority for the Government. Approximately 6 million euro has been allocated for

further implementation efforts of the strategy for Roma inclusion during 2016 through 2019.

Mr Chair,

Sweden has a feminist Government.

For a feminist Government, gender equality is part of the solution to many of the challenges that we face in society.

We are convinced that gender equality is a fundamental matter of human rights, democracy and social justice as well as a precondition for sustainable and inclusive growth and welfare. We are firmly committed to making a difference in policy choices, priorities and allocation of resources to reach gender equality.

Recently the Government presented its action plan for a feminist foreign policy. The aim is to achieve concrete results that enhance both gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights by all women and girls. One area where the Swedish Foreign Service will continue to be a driving force is women's and girl's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

There is a need to continue to strengthen legislation on discrimination in order to be as effective and comprehensive as possible.

This includes amending the rules on active measures in the fields of education and working life in the Discrimination Act to cover all seven grounds of discrimination. The Government intends to submit a Bill to the Parliament on these matters during this spring.

Mr Chair,

Sweden and Europe are in the midst of providing security and safety to people fleeing war, persecution and oppression.

In the worst refugee situation since the Second World War, the Swedish people are showing great solidarity. We stand up for the international right of asylum.

In 2015, more than 160 000 asylum seekers came to Sweden, of which about 35 000 were unaccompanied minors. This makes Sweden one of the EU Member State with the highest number of asylum seekers per capita. The number of children and young people arriving during the

autumn 2015 was so high that it was equivalent to more than 100 new school classes each week

Unaccompanied children have the same rights as all other children. Sweden takes an extensive responsibility for children in need of international protection and has the highest number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors in the EU. The Government and the main opposition parties have agreed on a review of the entire situation concerning the placement and treatment of unaccompanied minors including issues such as accommodation, legal representation and interpreters.

At the moment we host over 180 000 asylum seekers in our system. , The capacity of our reception system has thus been stretched, creating challenges within the fields of housing, education and jobs. We have a lack of school facilities and teachers as well as health care and social services. Authorities and municipalities have warned that important social functions cannot adjust to the current situation. It is of the utmost importance that the reception of newcomers remains dignified.

In recent months the Government therefore had to prepare a temporary adjustment of the Swedish legislation on asylum in order to secure a sustainable and effective reception system.

A global crisis requires a response built on solidarity and responsibility sharing, also within the EU. Sweden is committed to work for a new and sustainable asylum system in the EU, based on a fair distribution system of all asylum seekers.

In order to have an effective and solidarity-based refugee reception, all municipalities in Sweden must join in and take responsibility. Therefore a new Act on Reception came into force on 1 March 2016. Under the new Act, all municipalities can be required to receive new arrivals for settlement in the municipality based on their own situation and possibilities regarding the labour market, population and other reception services provided.

One integration challenge is to make use of knowledge and skills of foreign born people who live in our country, or who have just arrived. The Government has therefore introduced reinforced labour market-oriented measures, complementary education and programs for validation of degrees and work placement.

Mr Chair,

I regret to inform this Committee that a number of asylum accommodations have been set to fire and others vandalised. It is fortunate that no person has so far suffered injuries from this. It is a priority for the Police to ensure the safety of asylum seekers as well as asylum accommodations. The police work closely with the Migration Agency who runs the accommodations as well as the municipalities on site.

Xenophobic, racist or violent extremist acts can never be accepted. They must be investigated in full and preventive measures must be taken.

In recent years, the number of vulnerable EU-citizens staying temporarily in Sweden has risen. The Government has a profound understanding of the situation for these EU citizens, including Roma, when staying temporarily in Sweden without having the right to residence here. One important aim for the Government is to work for an improvement of their living conditions in their home countries. It is important to have a long-term perspective on these issues. The Government has therefore taken a number of initiatives, both bilaterally with Romania and Bulgaria and at EU level.

The National Coordinator with the task of supporting the work being done by public actors in this field recently presented his report to the Government; where he addresses the need for continued coordination of measures at regional level with regard to vulnerable EU citizens. The Government we will now consider the report's proposals.

The Government has taken measures against the exploitation of persons in vulnerable situations, exposed to risks of forced labour or begging and to investigate exploitation of labour migrants.

The Police is giving priority to fighting trafficking and a strategic decision was taken in October last year to lay the ground for improvements in the investigating ability, and in the ability to assist and protect. A particular series of measures are also being taken in order to better investigate crimes against vulnerable EU-citizens, including hate crimes. In order to address the underreporting of crimes from this group, the Police will invest in outreach and information activities.

Mr Chair,

The promotion and protection of equal rights and opportunities for LGBT persons remain a priority.

The Government is currently consulting on a proposal from an inquiry regarding stronger legal protection for transgender persons under criminal law.

Mr Chair,

Hate speech and hate crime undermine democratic values and run counter to the principle of the equal value of all people. Measures to combat hate crime, both within the judicial system and in other parts of society, are therefore a matter of priority for the Government.

A national plan against racism, similar forms of hostility and hate crimes will be presented by the Government. The national plan will have a focus on racism in general as well as on different forms of racism such as afrophobia, anti-Semitism, antiziganism and islamophobia.

In March last year, the Swedish Police reported the results of a Government commission to develop its efforts to combat hate crime to the Minister for Home Affairs. As a result, the Police is raising its ambition combatting hate crimes and other crimes threatening human rights and freedoms, such as the freedom of opinion and expression.

One such worrying trend is the hate and threats that aims to silence journalists and politicians. The Swedish government will take action to increase awareness and develop preventive measures.

Turning to the issue concerning an independent, civilian body to investigate complaints against the Police, the new Department of Special Investigations within the new, single Swedish Police Authority has now been in operation in little over a year. We share the view of the Committee that this type of investigations must be conducted independently from all other police work. We strongly believe that the trust of the general public is key if the Police is to perform its duties well. I am proud to state that in the recent safety barometer, the trust for the Swedish Judiciary in general is high and the trust for the Police is slightly on the increase from an already high level.

Quality reasons, including access to a broad set of investigative skills, have lead us to conclude that internal investigations should stay within the realm of the Police. We ensure the independence by a budget completely separate from the Police and by a appointment of the Director directly by the Government.

The last report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the CPT), based on its visit last year, concludes that the setting up of the

new Department of Special Investigations has addressed most of its concerns, in particular the strengthening of the independence of the new Department.

Mr Chair,

Under the Instrument of Government, all citizens and foreign nationals in Sweden are protected against torture. It is not possible to restrict this protection. In addition, the ban on torture in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms has the force of law in Sweden.

As stated in our report, in June 2014 the Government appointed an inquiry to consider the need to introduce a specific crime of torture in Swedish penal law. The inquiry proposed, among other things, that such a crime should be introduced.

Mr Chair,

Combatting violence against women is a priority for the Government.

In order to reach the goal to end men's violence against women, the Government is investing in measures that prevent violence. These measures involve, inter alia, violence prevention programs in schools, financial support to counselling centers for perpetrators and treatment programs for offenders in the Prison and Probation Service.

Violence and abuse against women and children with disabilities have long been neglected. Even though there still is a general lack of data concerning the prevalence of violence against this group, public awareness in Sweden is increasing. Programmes targeting violence against women and children shall always include a disability perspective.

The Government has allocated more than 10 million euro annually to women's shelters organisations, including shelters for women with substance abuse, women with disabilities and women trapped in prostitution or human trafficking for sexual purposes.

The Government will present an update of the national action plan in order to protect children from trafficking, exploitation and sexual abuse for the period 2016–2018.

Strong legal protection against men's violence against women including sexual offences is of the utmost importance. The Government has appointed an inquiry to review the Penal Code provision on rape and is considering including a consent-based regulation and a negligence offense regarding rape.

The review includes analysing the causes to why so few reports of rape lead to prosecutions and convictions and considering measures to enable the judicial system to further improve its work in the area.

Mr Chair,

In August last year the Government agreed upon a national counter-terrorism strategy. One important principle in the strategy is that fundamental rights and freedoms and the rule of law must be ensured in all actions to combat terrorism. Terrorism in itself is a threat against fundamental rights and freedoms of our citizens, and in our efforts to counter this phenomenon we must uphold and respect our obligations according to international law.

Terrorism is an extreme form of violent extremism. To prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism it is essential to address norms, values and attitudes that interact and contribute towards the growth of, and recruitment to violent and political or religious extremist ideologies.

The most comprehensive preventive measure is the National Coordinator to safeguard democracy against violent extremism, who was appointed in 2014. The Coordinator shall create awareness of all forms of violent extremism and ensure that preventive methods are developed on local and national levels.

The implementation of an EU directive on the right of access to a lawyer will further strengthen the rights of suspects deprived of their liberty. A Government bill is planned for spring 2016.

Further, as of 2016 the Government has asked the Swedish Prison and Probation Service to report which ways the authority is working to draw attention to human rights. The report shall include how the authority addresses criticism and recommendations as a result of international or national review.

A public inquiry has been tasked with investigating what actions should be taken to limit remand periods and the use of restrictions and to mitigate against the isolation of persons on remand.

In April 2015 The Swedish Prosecution Authority decided on new Guidelines and Regulations with the aim to reduce the use of restrictions for persons in pre-trial detention. The Government has also asked the Swedish Agency for Public Management and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention to further study these issues.

Mr Chair,

Before I close, I would like to highlight the crucial role civil society organisations have played and continue to play in pushing for respect for human rights. These organisations have been given the opportunity to comment on the periodic report. We also welcome the submission of reports from civil society organisations and others to the Committee.

Finally I wish to underline the Government's commitment to the Rule of Law and to the promotion of the legal principles therein. The protection of civil and political rights constitutes a fundamental task for a state that adheres to the principle of Rule of Law.

On that note, I myself and my delegation are prepared to answer any questions the members of the Committee may wish to ask.

Thank you, Mr Chair.