



**Ministry of Health and Social
Affairs
Sweden**

**Opening statement by State Secretary Pernilla Baralt, Government of
Sweden, at the sixty-third session in Geneva of the Committee on the
Elimination of Discrimination against Women**

Madam Chair,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me and for the Swedish delegation to present Sweden's combined eighth and ninth report on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention.

This dialogue is of great importance to my Government, not least because we are a feminist Government. With this clear statement come high expectations both from us and from society at large.

The composition of our delegation reflects the broad mandate and scope of Sweden's policy for promoting gender equality in all areas of governance. I am joined by representatives from seven ministries who are all actively involved in the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Gender equality is a fundamental matter of human rights, democracy and social justice. It is also a precondition and a driver for sustainable growth and for sustainable welfare.

To combat the discrimination against women and girls is also crucial to reach the goals of the new 2030 Agenda.

To fight discrimination against women and girls and to reach gender equality is a means to ensure that every girl and boy, every woman and man, can reach their full potential.

We are committed to take decisions and to allocate resources to promote real change, in the daily life of women and men.

Sweden was among the first countries to ratify the Cedaw Convention in 1980. Since then a large number of important laws and transformative policies have laid the foundation for the level of gender equality we have today. This progress has to a large extent been driven by the women's movement.

The Swedish Government is proud of our record on gender equality. However, we acknowledge that women and girls are still at a disadvantage relative to men and boys. We therefore welcome this opportunity to be reviewed and to engage in today's dialogue on how to fulfil the obligations of the Convention.

We as a government will also - together with NGOs - step up our efforts to make the convention more known. As a first step we will translate and distribute the concluding observations.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished experts,

Since Sweden presented its combined eighth and ninth CEDAW report in 2014, a new Government has taken office.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of our priorities and initiatives.

Gender mainstreaming is the main strategy to implement gender equality and achieve the national gender equality objectives.

Vital for the success of gender mainstreaming is strong leadership. It has therefore been crucial that the Prime Minister, Mr Stefan Löfvén, is committed and outspoken on the importance of gender equality. Each minister has the task to deliver on gender equality. It is everyone's responsibility. Training on gender mainstreaming has been provided to all ministers and state secretaries as well as to key government officials.

Engagement is important but so is competence and knowledge on gender mainstreaming. Our feminist government has initiated extensive work to ensure that gender equality has a broad impact in all policy areas. Objectives and indicators to monitor progress have been set in all key policy areas. This is also important when it comes to communication and in order to be held accountable as a Government.

Another initiative is the Government's programme to strengthen gender mainstreaming of government agencies. Since we took office the number of agencies has increased from 18 to 60.

The national budget is a key tool to reach gender equality.

Ahead of the 2017 budget Bill the Ministry of Finance has stated that all measures provided by the various ministries must include a gender equality analysis.

In 2014 the Government commissioned an inquiry to review the gender equality policy objectives and assess gender equality progress over the last ten years. A government communication is now being prepared to be presented to the Swedish Parliament in September 2016. The aim is to have a systematic approach and to move from projects to sustainable programmes.

Madam Chair,

Most of the decisions that impact the daily lives of girls and boys, women and men are taken at the local level: in school, social services and health care. The Government has taken an active role in supporting municipalities and regions in their efforts to mainstream gender into their public services. One example is an agreement between the Government and Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions to implement measures that involve men and boys in gender equality activities at local level.

The fight against all forms of discrimination is one of the key human rights objectives of my Government. This includes all forms of discrimination based on sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. Persons exposed to discrimination on multiple grounds are particularly vulnerable.

An effective legal framework is important in combating discrimination. An inquiry has been appointed and they will propose ways of better streamlining anti-discrimination efforts.

To combat discrimination will also be an important part of the new Government policy on disabilities. As well as to make the Cedaw Convention more well known.

As part of Sweden's efforts to strengthen the protection of national minorities, the national strategy for Roma inclusion has a gender equality perspective. In addition, the Sami Parliament is preparing a new action plan

on gender mainstreaming. It is intended for both staff, members of the Parliament and the Sami public at large.

Distinguished members of the Committee,
Madam Chair,

I now turn to a few of our policy priorities.

Let me start by underlining that gender equality is not just a 'women's issue'. It is a responsibility of and a benefit to the society as whole. It requires the active contribution and input from women and men, girls and boys.

For instance we have recently introduced a third month of parental leave reserved for each parent. It has a positive impact on men's role as fathers and on women's employment. It also enables the access of the child to both parents.

A top priority is to combat men's violence against women. Despite extensive work, crime data show that men's violence against women is still a very serious societal problem.

The Government is presently preparing a new holistic strategy to end men's violence against women. It will be guided by a set of objectives and indicators to enable improved evaluation and follow up results.

In order to stop men's violence against women, the Government is investing in violence prevention measures involving schools, counselling centres for perpetrators and rehabilitation programmes for male offenders, provided by the Prison and Probation Service.

Furthermore, the Government has allocated more than EUR 10 million per year to women's shelter organisations, including shelters for women with substance abuse, women with disabilities and women trapped in prostitution or human trafficking for sexual purposes.

Women with disabilities are an integrated part of all general programmes targeting violence against women.

The Swedish Agency for Participation has also recently been commissioned to prepare a specific action plan targeting this group.

Strong legal protection against men's violence against women, including sexual offences, is of the outmost importance. The Government has appointed an inquiry to review the Penal Code's provisions on rape and is

considering introducing a consent-based regulation and a negligence offence regarding rape.

I would also like to mention our efforts to combat human trafficking and prostitution. Street prostitution in Sweden has decreased by 50 percent since 1995 as a result of the sexual offenses legislation.

In addition a recent survey indicates that the number of individuals in prostitution has not increased. An important part of our work is to focus on preventive and protective interventions and to discourage the demand for sexual services.

In September 2014 an inquiry was commissioned to analyze the possible removal of the requirement for dual criminality for purchase of a sexual service, and thereby making possible a legal trial also when the purchase of a sexual service has been made abroad.

According to the Government, purchases of sexual services are unacceptable regardless of where in the world they take place.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

In the area of health and medical care, unacceptable differences between women and men persist and seem to increase in certain areas.

Illnesses that affect women more often than men tend to be less prioritised in the health care system.

Mental illness and stress problems are common causes of sick leave, which is increasing both for women and men; however, the increase is greater among women. In light of this, the Government has appointed a National Commission for Equity in Health, which includes a gender perspective in its work.

The Government has also provided additional funding for health services for school pupils, in response to findings in national studies that a growing number of girls and young women are experiencing mental health problems. Investments in parental support is also done on in order to promote the psychological health of young boys and girls.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Promoting equal economic opportunities between women and men is a fundamental part of the gender equality policy.

Parental insurance, combined with an extensive system of public child care and elderly care, has made it possible for parents to combine work and family life.

The Government has commissioned the Swedish Public Employment Service to tailor activities to promote gender equality in the labour market.

The Government has also commissioned an inquiry to investigate how the parental insurance scheme can be tailored to contribute to gender-equal parenting. The Government has also raised the temporary parental benefits, which are more often used by women.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in temporary employment in the labour market, which affects women to a greater extent than men. A legislative amendment has been introduced. It ensures that general fixed-term employment will be converted into indefinite-term employment if the aggregate length of employment in a general fixed-term position exceeds two years.

Another important issue is the right to full-time employment for women. Full-time should be standard and part-time a possibility. This is a question to be handled by the social partner on the labour market.

Increased employment levels are particularly important for women born outside Sweden as well as among women with disabilities. The Government is working on relevant initiatives.

To prevent gender-based wage discrimination by employers, the Government has put forward a bill on reintroducing mandatory annual pay surveys.

Another expression of inequality in working life concerns women's representation. While the Government has attained gender-balanced boards and management teams in state-owned companies, the private sector is lagging behind in making use of women's talents. The Government has emphasised that the proportion of women on boards should be at least 40 per cent by 2016. If this objective is not achieved by voluntary measures, the Government will propose legislation on quotas.

Gender equality is also a prerequisite for sustainable regional growth. Women in rural areas have the same access to basic services, such as health care and education, as their urban peers, but women leave rural areas for job opportunities in cities to a greater extent than men. This problem also exists in some suburban areas.

The need for further efforts to promote gender equality linked employment and the labour market becomes evident when you look at the pension gap between men and women. Women have low pensions and, on average, women also live longer than men.

Measures have therefore been taken to increase women's pensions as part of the reform to increase the income tax allowance for pensioners.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished experts,

Education is crucial to enable all girls and boys to claim and defend their rights and achieve their full potential.

The Education Act and the school curricula emphasise that gender equality should permeate and guide all levels of the school system.

Sadly, there is strong gender segregation in education. A particularly prominent feature is the existence of 'typically female' fields of study and 'typically male' fields of study.

In order to change this pattern, measures have been taken to improve educational and vocational guidance to pupils in compulsory, upper secondary and adult education, so as to provide support for pupils to ensure their study and career choices are not limited by their gender.

More women than men choose to go on to higher education and there has been a steady increase in the number of women in academic positions, except among professors. The proportion of female professors is now about 25 per cent. This is not good enough. We are currently reviewing recruitment objectives in order to further increase the number of female professors. The Government has appointed an inquiry to propose measures to create more attractive conditions for both women's and men's research careers.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished experts,

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

In 2016 particular attention will be devoted to:

- To promote the inclusion and meaningful participation of women in peace processes, and thereby making women visible as agents of change for peace.

Other priorities will be:

- to strengthen the human rights of women and girls in humanitarian settings,
- to combat gender-based and sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and
- to enhance the economic empowerment of women as a human right and a means for inclusive and sustainable development.

The Swedish Foreign Service will also continue to be a driving force for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. In 2016 it will devote special attention to the rights of girls and young people in this context.

Sweden welcomes the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda is of the utmost importance, and Sweden recently initiated the implementation process.

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Sweden and Europe are providing security and safety to women and men fleeing war, persecution and oppression.

The number of people seeking asylum, particularly unaccompanied minors, has increased dramatically in Sweden. In 2015 Sweden received 160 000 asylum applicants of which about 35 000 were unaccompanied minors. This is of course a great challenge for Sweden and also an opportunity. The reception system and responsible social services are however under a lot of pressure.

In relation to this situation the government has taken several decisions and new initiatives, including large financial support to the local and regional level. Initiatives are also taken in order to improve education and entrance on the labour market.

We also recognise the challenges related to gender and women's rights in this new situation and are in the process of preparing relevant measures including increased knowledge on women's rights.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,

During the preparatory work, women's organisations and other non-governmental organisations were given the opportunity to comment on the periodic report. These organisations have played and continue to play a critical role in pushing for gender equality and women's rights.

On behalf of the Swedish Government, I would like to commend the Committee on its important work. The discussion today and the comments on our periodic reports are a vital and inspiring input for us as we continue the challenge of creating a gender-equal society. My colleagues and I welcome this opportunity to have a dialogue with the Members of the Committee.

The Government will organise a press conference in Sweden after the Committee has issued its recommendations.

Madame Chair, Members of the Committee, thank you for your attention.

We are now prepared to answer any questions you may have to the best of our ability.