



11 January 2005

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
Sweden

**Introductory statement by Ambassador Elisabeth Borsiin Bonnier
Committee on the Rights of the Child, 22 January 2005**

Mr. President, distinguished Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to present the Government of Sweden's third state report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Swedish delegation is looking forward to a fruitful dialogue with the members of the Committee on how to further improve and strengthen the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child at the national level. We would also like to discuss areas where further efforts should or can be made. The delegation looks forward to your comments and views and to take part of your observations and recommendations.

Initially, it was envisaged that the State Secretary at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Mr Staffan Bengtsson would head the Swedish delegation before the Committee. However, the Tsunami on 26th December, where a large amount of Swedes perished or are still missing, forced him to change his plans and to remain in Sweden in order to attend to urgent matters and duties related to the consequences of this enormous natural catastrophe and human tragedy.

Despite these circumstances and in order to respect the work schedule of the Committee, it was decided that Sweden would nevertheless appear as planned before the Committee. Therefore, I, as the Permanent Representative to the United Nations is appointed to replace him as head of the delegation and Ms. Carin Jahn, director and head of the unit responsible for the child rights policies and coordination thereof within the Government's offices, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs will be the alternate head of delegation.

Mr President, allow me to introduce the rest of the Swedish delegation:

Mr. Mihail Stoican, desk officer at the same unit,
Ms. Agneta Björklund, desk officer, Department for Social Services,
Ministry of Health and Social Affairs;
Ms. Gunilla Bäcklund, legal adviser, Department for Criminal Law,
Ministry of Justice;
Mr. Erik Stenström, desk officer, Department for Migration and Asylum
Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
Ms. Margareta Wiman, desk officer, Department for Schools, Ministry of
Education, Research and Culture and
Ms. Ulrika Sundberg, minister at the Permanent Mission of Sweden,
Geneva.

Fifteen years have passed since Sweden, as one of the first states, ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The work of the Government to implement the provisions of the Convention within the Swedish society, in its politics and decision-making at different levels is constantly on-going. Over this period, the Government has been faced with a changing society and new challenges and has had to adapt or revise its policies and strategies to tackle these in order to fulfil the Convention's obligations.

The report, before us today, is over two years old and a number of measures and actions have been taken since it was written. Some of these are described in the additional and updated information, which was sent in December 2004. Regarding, Sweden's implementation of the recommendations of the Committee from 1999, I would like to refer to the report and the additional information submitted, which I am sure you are well acquainted with. We are of course willing to elaborate further on these and other issues.

Let me now shortly present some of the major measures adopted since our last meeting and to inform the Committee about the progress made to strengthen children's rights based i.a. on the Committee's recommendations, and to focus on measures undertaken after October 2002, when the third state report was submitted.

The corner stone of the Swedish Child policies is the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Swedish society. This policy has been operationalised in a strategy, which was unanimously approved by the Parliament in 1999 and is exhaustively described in our report.

One key aspect in the implementation of the convention is to ensure that everyone working with children and their issues: politicians,

professionals and decision-makers at all levels have a thorough knowledge of the Convention, its purpose, principles and provisions.

The strategy tries to ensure that all higher education programmes for professional groups includes training of the convention and its content. Also politicians at different levels and civil servants, such as social workers, teachers, policemen, prosecutors, city planners etc. must be offered in-service training.

The National Agency for Higher Education has been tasked to promote higher education institutions to incorporate the Convention in their various training programmes and the government has commissioned the universities and other higher education institutions to report on their actions in this respect.

The operationalisation of the strategy to implement the Convention rests on the following six main actors:

1. The Government's offices

The Convention must be an active instrument and permeate all decisions, affecting children, taken by the government.

Within the Governmental Offices, a special function and unit has been set up to ensure that the Convention permeates the Governments policies and decision-making, including new and amended legislation, which affect children. Its task is also to promote implementation work by State authorities, municipalities and county councils. The unit is also responsible for the drafting of the state reports to the Committee.

2. The Governmental agencies

The governmental agencies play a crucial role within their respective areas of responsibility. The government has commissioned some forty agencies to adopt a child rights approach and perspective in their work, among them the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Prosecutor General, the National Police Board, the National Social Insurance Board, the Swedish Rescue Services Agency and the Swedish Road Administration.

3. The local governments (county councils and municipalities)

The local and regional authorities are the main actors in the implementation work. Most services and decisions, which directly affect children, are provided by the municipalities and the county councils. These are for example schools and pre-schools, social services, clubs and recreation centres, sports centres and playgrounds, child health centres

as well as buses and other means of transportation. Municipal decisions on traffic, building and planning affect the daily lives of children.

The main instruments available to the Government to support the work at the local level consist of legislative measures, allocation of state resources, state grants and special financial incentives. The Government also has the possibility to supervise through its central agencies the implementation of the legislation at local level.

The Government also supports the implementation by disseminating examples of best practises. Some ten municipalities have created a partnership around the Convention and work with the support of the Government.

4. The Children's Ombudsman

The Children's Ombudsman plays an important role in promoting, supporting and monitoring the implementation of the Convention by the above mentioned actors. In 2002, the law on the Children Ombudsman was amended and the mandate expanded and strengthened. The new powers include the right to request information from state, regional and local authorities and to summon these for consultations concerning progress achieved by the relevant state actors with respect to the implementation of the Convention. The Ombudsman has also been given additional resources.

5. The active participation of children

Developing methods and measures which would allow children to influence their lives and environment is a great challenge. Holding dialogues with children and young people and their participation in the decision-making at the different levels in society, where the decisions that directly affecting them are taken, is also a vital part of the strategy e.g. in pre-schools and schools as well as in the municipal and traffic planning. The responsible minister for the child policies has set up a reference group of young girls and boys, which meets twice a year, to discuss different issues of importance for the children.

The government strategy has been evaluated and resulted in an up-dated and revised strategy, which was presented to the Parliament in January 2004. The evaluation concluded that a lot of progress had been made, but that much work remained to be done to promote and support different authorities, municipalities and county councils in their implementation work. Also within the Governmental Offices and its work more efforts were found to be needed to move ahead.

The revised strategy focuses on i.a. introducing a child perspective in the national budget process and on further integration of the Convention into the work of public authorities and on developing methods for more active participation of children in the society.

6. Cooperation and dialogue with NGOs

In the work to strengthen children's rights also the NGO:s play an important role in following and monitoring the situation of children and to draw the Governments attention to gaps or deficiencies in the society. The Government is favourable to develop a strengthened dialogue with NGO:s and other representatives of the civil society in order to increase its performance in this respect.

In the budget proposal to Parliament for 2005, the Government suggested that measures to support children in poor families, a better child-competence within the health-care sector, children and young people with mental ill-health and children that has been sexually exploited or sexually abused should be priority areas in the coming years.

7. Awareness raising initiatives around particular issues

In 2003, the Swedish Government adopted a National Action Plan against female genital mutilation and it also hosted an international conference against female genital mutilation and invited international experts, African countries, local community organisations and NGOs. The purpose was to raise awareness nationally and internationally about this heinous practice and to stop it. Similarly, the Swedish Government hosted in November 2004 an international conference on honour related violence against women and girls, with a view of putting an end to the practice of honour killings or other forms of violence committed in the name of honour against young girls and women.

I can assure you, Mr President and distinguished members of the Committee, that the Swedish Government takes the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child very seriously. The Government strives for the full realization of the obligations under the Convention for all children living in Sweden. The objective of the Government's child policy is to ensure that the rights of children and young people are respected. They should have development

opportunities and security and be able to participate and influence the society in which they live. The message of the Convention can be summarized by saying that children must be respected. Implementing the convention -and rooting its perspective- is a long-term process which demands perseverance, constant efforts and adapting them over time.

Mr. President, distinguished members of the Committee, the Swedish delegation stands ready to listen to you and to answer your questions. . We hope for a fruitful dialogue during today's session.

Thank you.