



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

"Climate change impacts on security - now the UN must act"

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Translation of an article published in Dagens Nyheter on 10 July 2018.

Today the members of the United Nations Security Council are meeting to discuss climate change and security for the first time in seven years. In recent years, clear signs of climate change have made it difficult to turn a blind eye.

The aim of today's meeting, chaired by Sweden, is to increase understanding about the exacerbating effects of climate change on conflict.

In Sweden this year, spring and summer have been characterised by extreme weather. Water shortages, forest fires and crop failures have become recurring news stories. The issue feels increasingly relevant and part of our reality. Extreme heat is now also affecting Canada and California, while extreme rainfall across Japan has led to two million people being evacuated from their homes, and more than 120 people have died.

But people in poor countries are those hardest hit by the adverse impacts of climate change. There, resilience to extreme weather events and crop failure is extremely low. Women are often disproportionately vulnerable in these situations. Fragile countries risk being stuck in a vicious cycle of instability and climate risks.

A few days ago, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and other United Nations and African Union representatives conducted a joint visit to Chad and Niger. In doing so, we continue the focus on a region where the link between climate change and security is particularly clear. This will help us better understand

the various dimensions of the conflict, such as links to terrorism, lack of development, gender inequality and the impact of climate change. The visit made clear that traditional security measures are not enough to promote peace and security.

Last year, the Security Council also travelled to the Lake Chad region. After the trip, Sweden initiated a ground-breaking resolution that was the first to identify the impact of climate change on a specific conflict, and called for the UN to strengthen its capacity to respond. This marked the beginning of a new approach to climate change in the Security Council.

The Sahel region of West Africa has been hit hard, especially Mali and the Lake Chad region. Shorter and less predictable rainy seasons have increased competition for scarce resources, exacerbating existing tensions between herders and settled farmers. People's livelihoods and food security are threatened, further increasing people's vulnerability. In countries where resilience to crisis is weak and social and economic security extremely limited, we see more and more people being recruited by extremist groups offering money and food. Many choose to leave their homes and flee.

Another telling example is the many small island state that are at risk of being submerged when sea levels rise. It is difficult to image the consequences of entire nations potentially disappearing.

These are only a few examples of the link between climate and conflict. We need to better understand how climate interacts with, and at times reinforces, patterns of conflict. Without this understanding, we — the international community — will never be able to take fully informed decisions to promote peace and prevent conflicts.

Sweden has worked intensively to bring greater international attention to the issue. The international community must be better at understanding, highlighting and committing to action against the threats of climate change. This means improving conflict prevention work.

The United Nations Security Council, whose primary responsibility is the maintenance of international peace and security, must lead the way. We simply cannot ignore this issue in our quest for sustainable and peaceful development. Since Sweden took its seat on the Security Council, we have worked continuously to raise awareness of this issue. And we have achieved many important results. Sweden is working with other like-minded countries to draw attention to climate-related security risks, and we have seen results in regions including West Africa and the Sahel, and countries such as Somalia and Mali. We also work strategically with incoming Security Council members to ensure that the issue continues to receive the attention it

deserves when Sweden is no longer a member.

Sweden is doing its share, in foreign policy, climate policy and aid policy. Sweden is demonstrating global leadership in climate finance and development cooperation, and is the highest per capita donor to most of the largest multilateral climate funds. Climate and conflict perspectives are continuously integrated into development cooperation, and a range of contributions focusing on climate and security are being implemented.

The Government also supports the establishment of an international research centre for climate and security, the Stockholm Climate Security Hub, which will engage some of the leading Swedish research institutes in the field. This will be launched in conjunction with World Water Week in August with the aim of promoting knowledge development and policy dialogue in the area, not least to support the UN and other multilateral actors with evidence-based analysis.

Today's Security Council debate on climate and security was far from self-evident. But our efforts are met with ever-clearer support from countries on all continents, and with great gratitude especially from the many affected countries that are already experiencing the grave effects of climate change.

We are now looking ahead to next year's UN climate summit. If we are serious about the Global Goals, including global sustainable development and peace and security, then climate-related security risks must be on the global agenda. The situation is acute. And we have no time to lose.

Margot Wallström

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Isabella Lövin

Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of the Environment, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

To lead on climate, countries must commit to zero emissions

Published 25 April 2018

Opinion piece by Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, and Deputy Prime Minister Ms Isabella Lövin in *The Guardian*, 17 April 2018.

What does it mean for a nation to be a "climate leader" in 2018?

At the very least, it must mean having a firm plan in place to deliver your nation's fair share of the Paris agreement. During that stunning fortnight in December 2015, 195 governments freely and willingly committed not only to keep global warming well below 2C, but to aim for the safer level of 1.5C. And they committed to bring net greenhouse gas emissions down to zero.

I cannot help but feel huge pride that my government was the first in the western world to step up and deliver on the Paris agreement. In June last year, we adopted a target of cutting Sweden's net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2045, and we set it in law. Within a generation, Sweden will not be contributing to the problem of climate change. Science tells us that if all nations adopt this target, there is a good chance that we will live up to the commitments that we made at the Paris summit, and keep climate change within safe boundaries.

Our law does not only set an emissions target and a date. Every year the government must present a progress report to parliament, and every four years it must make a new set of policies that deliver ever-greater emission cuts. This way we will ensure that we will make steady progress towards our net-zero target.

For these ingredients of our law, we owe the UK a debt of gratitude. Ten

years ago, the UK brought in the first law in the world that set a legally binding target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Sweden borrowed heavily from the UK Climate Change Act in drawing up our own, as have other countries such as Denmark and Finland.

Climate laws deliver something that in a healthy democracy is invaluable for businesses and citizens: certainty. Our companies know that fossil fuels will be virtually eliminated over the next 25 years; coal has already gone, and oil and gas will follow. Certainty helps citizens, companies, investors and the government itself to make better decisions. For example, it is clearly good sense that all new houses are built so as to waste very little energy, so eliminating the need for more expensive retro-fitting in a decade's time.

A number of other countries have stepped up since the Paris summit by committing to net zero emissions targets by 2040 or 2050. They include France, Iceland and New Zealand – but also some developing nations such as Costa Rica and Bhutan. Driven by a progressive alliance including Sweden and the UK, the European Union is heading in the same direction. The EU parliament has already voted for a net zero target, and the commission is updating its energy and climate roadmap in line with the Paris agreement – a process which will inevitably recommend a net zero target for the EU with a target date no later than 2050.

More nations will inevitably follow later this year. In October the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will publish a landmark report which is expected to confirm that the world will need to be at net zero emissions by mid-century in order to deliver on the Paris agreement. Those countries where finance and modern technology are more available will naturally be expected to take the lead in getting there. The IPCC is an intergovernmental body – so at that point, it will clearly be untenable for any western government that does not have a net zero target with an appropriate date and a means of delivering it to claim to be a "climate leader".

Meeting a net zero target will not be easy for all sectors of the economy. We know how to do it for electricity, heating and road transport; for others such as agriculture and aviation it will be more challenging. Here, we must trust to innovation, the speed of which continues to amaze. And we can accelerate changes in these sectors with specific financial instruments such as the aviation tax that Sweden introduced this month.

Certainly it is not acceptable for any government or statutory adviser to say that net zero cannot be done. It has to be done – because as long as we

continue emitting carbon dioxide, temperatures will continue to rise. Claiming that net zero is impossible would mean giving up on the imperative of halting climate change; accepting that we will never hold back the tide of rising sea levels, failing food supplies, species extinctions and an acidifying ocean. That is not a world that I can bequeath to my children and grandchildren; nor, I believe, can any responsible leader.

Ten years ago, the UK won the gratitude of many other nations, including my own, by adopting the Climate Change Act. But science and diplomacy move on; and when the IPCC and the Paris agreement are telling us that greenhouse gas emissions need to reach net zero by mid-century, it is incumbent on us all to reflect that in our national programmes. That, at the very least, is what it means in 2018 to be a "climate leader".



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Let us work together, with courage and patience, to make the world more gender-equal

Published 15 April 2018

Today sees the opening of the Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality – a global conference with 600 participants from over 100 countries. The Forum will bring together activists, academics, politicians and entrepreneurs who put their energies into making the world more gender-equal.

If we want to achieve change, we must strive for it every day – through active and patient efforts. The women's movement showed the way, standing on the barricades and fighting for gender equality at both national and international level. Thanks to their fight, we have been able to launch, as the first government in the world, the feminist foreign policy. Sweden has received attention from all over the world, and several countries have followed suit with their own policies. Last autumn, the #MeToo movement gave international momentum to the gender equality issue.

But at the same time, we have also seen how the forces working actively against women and girls have gained in strength. This is a trend that is spreading, and all the while political leaders are reducing their global responsibility. This is dangerous and it means that those people who want a more gender-equal world need to come together even more than before. The Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality is thus taking place at a particularly important time.

Policy must lead to concrete results to be relevant. For us, therefore, it has been a priority to pursue a feminist foreign policy based on action and real

change. Let us point to a few examples:

We are investing SEK 1 billion in a global strategy for gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Activists and women's organisations working for gender equality often face strong opposition in their fight for human rights. The possibilities of working independently are reduced when financing and democratic space shrink.

We have started a network of women mediators who are active in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. We will continue our work to ensure women are involved in peace processes at all levels.

Thanks to the WikiGap campaign, which the Ministry for Foreign Affairs conducted together with Wikimedia on International Women's Day this year, Wikipedia now has over 2 500 more articles on women: an important contribution to the encyclopaedia, in which four in five of the articles about people are about men.

Through Sweden's engagement, the UN Security Council has considered the situation of women to a greater extent – a concrete example is that since Sweden took up a place on the Council, all of the Council's statements have mentioned women, peace and security.

Swedish support has enabled the UN body UNCTAD to produce a 'trade and gender toolbox' to help ensure that trade policy has a gender equality perspective. In addition, almost 100 Swedish embassies are now giving priority to raising and promoting gender equality issues in various ways.

The full list is much longer – and is a reason to be proud. It shows that it is possible to make a difference through determined and patient work.

Now that the Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality is getting under way, we want to reach out a hand to all of the forces in Sweden and the world that are working for gender equality: let us work together, with courage and patience, to make the world more gender-equal. The Forum is a launchpad for this. We cannot afford anything less.

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Isabella Lövin
Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, and
Deputy Prime Minister

Ann Linde
Minister for EU Affairs and Trade



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

SheDecides has grown into a global power

Published 02 March 2018

Sixteen million young girls and teenagers give birth each year – most of whom live in low-income countries. Unwanted and forced pregnancies can be prevented. But the right to contraception and safe abortions is currently under attack.

This is why one year ago today, Sweden and four other countries launched SheDecides – a movement that has grown into a global power for the right of all women and girls to decide over their own bodies.

In all, as many as 22 million women and girls around the world have unsafe abortions each year. Abortions account for almost 13 per cent of maternal mortality around the world. Studies by the World Health Organisation show that prohibiting and limiting legal abortions does not result in fewer abortions; it instead results in more women and girls dying as a result of unsafe, illegal abortions. Even so, one of President Trump's very first decisions on taking office last year was to reinstate and expand the Mexico City Policy. This decision prevents US aid from providing funding to foreign NGOs that perform or recommend abortions, or even provide information about the right of women and girls to have an abortion.

The Mexico City Policy has had the impact that President Trump intended. The US State Department recently published a report on implementation of the policy. The report states that to date, of more than 700 contracting partners, only four US partners and twelve subcontractors in the health field have chosen not to renew their agreements. Most of them were forced to sign agreements prohibiting them from working on the issue of abortion.

The policy impacts all organisations working on health issues that receive US aid, and so not only affects access to abortions but also access to maternal health care and contraceptives. Civil society organisations – an important advocate of women's rights – are forced into silence. This is why the Mexico City Policy is also known by the fitting epithet 'Global Gag Rule'. Many international partners and friends of the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education bear witness to a divided civil society in which everyone is forced to choose sides: stand up for the right to abortion and lose US funding, or consciously remain silent and witness the lives of women and girls being put at risk due to unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions.

One year ago today, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands jointly launched the SheDecides initiative – a movement to increase mobilisation of political forces throughout the world and increase financial support to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The SheDecides movement inspires hope that, together, we can bring about change. To date, more than 40 000 people have become Friends of SheDecides and taken a stand for the right of women and girls to decide over their own bodies. During the first year, over USD 445 million was raised and several countries, including Sweden, have announced that they will further increase their support in 2018.

Even before the Mexico City Policy was introduced, there was an enormous need of political and financial support to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls. For example, funds corresponding to SEK 100 billion are needed annually to give all girls and women in developing countries access to modern contraceptives and contraceptive advice. Abortions are totally banned in six countries around the world, and abortion legislation in another sixty or so countries is restrictive or very restrictive. The consequences of President Trump's policy, which include reduced access to contraceptives and increased maternal mortality, are not yet clear.

One of the most effective ways of limiting the empowerment, participation and influence of women and girls is to limit their access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Lack of knowledge of how the body works, child and forced marriages, discriminatory legislation and gender-stereotyped values and standards limit the opportunities for women and girls to go to school, participate in working life, make their voices heard and gain political influence. Poorer access to education and an income in turn affects the total economic development of entire countries and regions.

The right of women and girls to decide over their own sexuality and

reproduction is a top priority in development cooperation. The Swedish Government and the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education have different roles in this work, but we stand up for the full enjoyment of human rights by women and girls.

We encourage everyone – individuals, companies and civil society organisations – to become Friends of SheDecides on shedecides.com. Now more than ever, Sweden's voice is needed.

Isabella Lövin

Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate

Hans Linde

Chair, Swedish Association for Sexuality Education



Opinion piece

Swifter action is needed to honour the Paris Agreement

Published 16 November 2017

Opinion piece by Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, and Deputy Prime Minister.

Thanks to the Paris Agreement, the world is now working together to curb global warming, and right now the parties are gathered in Bonn, Germany to negotiate on how to implement the agreement. However, it is urgent that all countries significantly raise their ambitions and adapt long term policies for reducing carbon emissions. Otherwise we are likely to fail in meeting the Paris Agreement's ambitious goal of keeping the global temperature well below 2°C above pre-industrial level.

Sweden is the only country in the world that has adopted a goal of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. A new law that binds future governments to this goal has also been adopted. In addition, this law also requires the government to present an annual climate report in its Budget Bill.

Sweden has long shown that it is possible to adapt ambitious climate policies while also enjoying good economic growth. Despite having the world's highest carbon tax for more than 20 years and an unusually strict climate policy, seen in an international perspective, Swedish companies are at the forefront and have retained and reinforced their international competitiveness. At national level we now see that since 1990, emissions in Sweden have decreased by 25 per cent while GDP has increased by 69 per cent. Just as in many other parts of the world, we see that the link between the curves for carbon emissions and increased GDP has been broken. A shining example is the development in the renewable energy industry, where we can see how a significant fall in price can be linked to a dramatic increase

in employment and growth. Countries that remains dependent on fossil fuels risk lagging behind when the rest of the world continues on the path towards an efficient and climate-smart economy.

However, fossil fuel dependency still remains substantial in many parts of our society, not least in the transport sector and manufacturing industry. Transitioning these sectors is essential for curbing global warming, but requires sharp policies that drive the transition forward and include all actors within society. The Swedish climate law obliges governments to roll out sharp policies to end all emissions to 2045. It is also essential that rich countries assist developing countries in their efforts to reduce emissions and Sweden is a leading donor in climate development aid, both for mitigation and adaptation.

But despite the ongoing transition away from fossil fuels based economies, the global temperature continues to rise and in many places we are already witnessing the devastating effects of climate change. The world needs to scale up the climate work. We all need to do more. Countries, regions, cities and business now all need to move further, faster and step up together for the next generation.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of the Environment, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden has shown that climate action and economic growth are absolutely linked

Published 04 June 2017

Opinion piece by Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, and Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin, and Director Haga Initiative Nina Ekelund, published in Huffington Post on 2 June 2017.

A few days ago, US President Donald Trump followed through on his threat to leave the Paris Agreement. A total of 147 countries have ratified the Agreement, which states that a global temperature rise will remain well below two degrees Celsius, and efforts will be made to limit it even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The Paris Agreement was a decisive breakthrough in international climate efforts and is needed more than ever now that we are getting reports that Arctic ice is melting much faster than researchers expected. The US leaving the Paris Agreement is a huge setback for future international climate efforts. It also affects tomorrow's jobs and the labour market. The rest of the world cannot afford to slow down to wait for the US. Those who opt out of making the transition now will be left hopelessly behind.

An increasing number of companies see profitability and business opportunities in reducing their climate impact and respond to growing demand for sustainable solutions. The challenge of climate change requires policies and leadership that create opportunities for the business sector to use this to turn risks into opportunities. The US now risks moving in a direction diametrically opposed to its own development and the development of the rest of the world.

In connection with the annual spring meetings of the IMF and the World Bank, we co-organised a seminar on climate-smart growth and the business sector's role in the climate transition. The seminar in Washington pointed out the lessons Sweden has learned regarding the role of policies and the business sector and their interaction in the climate transition. Sweden is one of the most innovative countries in the world and at the same time has both one of the world's most ambitious goals for emissions reductions and for transition to a 100 per cent renewable electricity system.

It was long a common perception that climate efforts led to increased costs and that the aim of companies' climate efforts was to live up to requirements and avoid risks. In recent years, this perception has changed – companies have realised that ambitious climate efforts present opportunities. The Haga Initiative is a network of companies that wants to show that the business sector is part of the solution in the climate transition. Each of the fifteen heads of the companies that make up the Haga Initiative can describe how both customers and employees are more loyal to companies that take responsibility for the climate, and how climate efforts lead to technological development, innovations and new products that in turn result in new and better business opportunities. The Initiative's vision is actually working out so well that these companies have already achieved the previous climate objective of a 40 per cent reduction in emissions, and have now raised the bar – they intend to be fossil-free by 2030.

Swedish experience shows that predictability and effective policy levers play an important role in companies' transition potential. Despite having the world's highest carbon tax for more than 20 years and an unusually strict climate policy, seen in an international perspective, Swedish companies are at the forefront and have retained and reinforced their international competitiveness. At national level we now see that since 1990, emissions in Sweden have decreased by 25 per cent while GDP has increased by 69 per cent. Just as in many other parts of the world, we see that the link between the curves for carbon emissions and increased GDP has been broken. A shining example is the development in the renewable energy industry, where we can see how a significant fall in price can be linked to a dramatic increase in employment and growth.

These Swedish climate success stories are not surprising to those following the research. More than ten years ago, prominent economist Nicholas Stern stated that the costs of not taking action against climate change will be much higher than if the world takes decisive action now. Based on Mr Stern's realisation that it will be more expensive to take action later, the New

Climate Economy research commission stated in a report that it is less expensive to take action now, since many climate measures also lead to major benefits to society. Just recently the OECD published a report concluding that the G20-countries through acting on climate change can increase growth by 1% by 2021 and 2.8% by 2050. At company level, Harvard Professor Robert G. Eccles has shown that companies with a focus on sustainability perform better and have a higher market value than other companies.

In addition, parts of the US business sector would like to see a stronger climate policy. The "Business Backs Low-Carbon USA"-initiative has the support of more than 1 000 companies and investors in the United States. They want to see climate-smart investments and continued US support for the Paris Agreement, since this creates jobs and strengthens US competitiveness. China and the EU remain committed to the Paris Agreement. What will it mean if the US continues increasing its emissions when the rest of the world continues on the path towards an efficient and climate-smart economy?

There are 160 000 jobs in the coal industry, but there are twice as many jobs in the solar industry alone. There are 640 000 jobs in traditional industries linked to fossil energy, but there are 2.5 million jobs in the new climate economy. The US needs the green industry for its growth, its jobs and its welfare.

Several major companies in the US have taken the lead and contributed to green technological development around the world. The US also represents an important market for a number of Swedish companies. Sweden is one of the largest investors per capita in the US. Swedish companies create more than 330 000 jobs in the US. There is every reason now to focus on continuing to strengthen cooperation with these companies – and the states and cities in the US with ambitious climate agendas – to promote positive social development and ensure a market for sustainable enterprise internationally and on the other side of the Atlantic.

Isabella Lövin, Minister for Climate and Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden
Nina Ekelund, Director Haga Initiative*



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Opinion piece: "To us – She Decides"

Published 08 March 2017

Opinion piece by Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate Ms Isabella Lövin and seven European colleagues in Svenska Dagbladet, 8 March 2017.

Globally almost 225 million women and girls have an unmet need for contraception. Every day over 800 women and girls die from preventable causes related to pregnancy or child birth. Annually 22 million unsafe abortions occur and two million girls under 15 become mothers. This is the situation for millions of the most vulnerable women around the world. In our part of the world, pregnancies are fortunately in most cases happy circumstances. In other parts of the world, this is not the case. Indeed, a pregnancy can be life-threatening as well as life-changing. Therefore, women's and girls' full and equal enjoyment of all and their access to contraception and comprehensive sexuality education are key-priorities in our development policy.

During the last decades maternity mortality has almost halved thanks to hard work and increased access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Now we see worrying trends challenging this progress. We cannot afford to turn the positive trend backwards. It is literally a matter of life and death.

When we are fighting for women's and girls' rights, we are fighting for human rights for everyone. It is our firm conviction that a woman has the right to choose with whom she wants to start a family, when and if she wants to have children and how many children she wants. However, as the statistics clearly show, millions of the most vulnerable women around the world do not enjoy these basic human rights.

Today, on 8 March women around the world have for generations been fighting for justice, equality and human rights for everyone. We feel a strong gratitude for the strong and visionary women who have spoken for the justice, freedom and equality that we, our mothers and our daughters are enjoying today. And we feel a strong commitment to use the voice given to us to speak for the women, who don't yet have the privilege to speak for their own rights. When we stand tall today, we stand on the shoulders of women who fought before us. Therefore, we raise our voice for the women who are not heard.

Not only because from a human point of view it is the right thing to do. But also because we know that when we invest in women everybody wins. We cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals which the whole world agreed upon at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, if women are not an active part of development. And for women to be an active part of development, they must have control over their own bodies. According to a study done by McKinsey, global GDP could be increased by 26 % by 2025 if women were to get full equality to that of men.

Fighting for women's and girls' full and equal enjoyment of all human rights is not only the right thing to do, it is also a rational thing to do.

We turn up our engagement

Unfortunately, the fight for women's and girls' rights suffered a setback on 23 January with the reintroduction of the Mexico City Policy, also known as the Global Gag Rule. This will affect American funding for organisations working with sexual and reproductive health and rights. According to the NGO Marie Stopes International the consequences for the world's most vulnerable women will be very serious: up to 6.5 million additional unintended pregnancies, 2.1 million additional unsafe abortions and 21,700 additional maternal deaths between 2017 and 2020. And this is just one example from one organisation. The total impact can be much greater. Experience from last time the Global Gag Rule was introduced shows that the number of abortions actually increased.

Fortunately, several countries in the global North and South are longstanding political and financial supporters of women's rights. Several new initiatives have already been taken by individual EU Member States including fundraising and a holding of Ministerial Conference 'She Decides' to increase political and financial support for the agenda. The "She Decides" conference in Brussels last week brought together more than 50 countries from

Afghanistan to Canada and from Norway to Chad and raised 181 million Euro to this crucial agenda. What was as uplifting as the political support was the great financial support from private donors. This shows that women's and girls' rights are not just a political priority, it's a movement of people.

At the "She Decides"-conference, we saw the beginning of a movement which rallied financial and political support for non-governmental organizations and UN agencies that make sexual and reproductive health and rights a reality for millions of women and girls by providing access to counselling, evidence based information, non-discriminatory comprehensive sexuality education, family planning, modern contraceptives, safe delivery, HIV testing and safe abortion care. The broad international support for women's rights is crucial for the lives of millions of women and for the development of their countries.

And it shows that when other countries turn down their engagement in the fight for women's and girls' rights, we are ready to turn up our engagement.

With a number of like-minded EU-colleagues we have called upon the European Union to increase its funding for and make greater use of its influence in support of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

It's her decision

Deciding when to start a family is a decision for life. For girls and young women in the developing world starting a family is often equal to finishing school. Therefore, it is very important when this decision is taken. And it is very important that girls and young women themselves take that decision. Women who have the opportunity to decide for themselves will have healthier and better educated children. This is clearly recognized in the Agenda 2030 Goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages and Goal 5 that aims to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

To us, a girl's and a woman's body is for her to control. It's her decision with whom she wants children, how many and when she wants children. We want to give her the tools to decide for herself. Today on 8 March we want to send a message that is as important as it is simple: She decides!

Isabella Lövin, minister for development cooperation, Sweden,
Lilianne Ploumen, minister for foreign trade and development cooperation,
The Netherlands,

Alexander De Croo, deputy prime minister and minister for development cooperation, Belgium

Ulla Tørnæs, minister for development cooperation, Denmark,

Mr. Romain Schneider, Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Luxemburg

Kai Mykkänen, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, Finland

Sven Mikser, Foreign Minister of Estonia, Estonia

Teresa Ribeiro, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Portugal



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

"Dark Days for Children"

Published 14 February 2017 Updated 14 February 2017

Opinion piece by Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate Ms Isabella Lövin, and Executive Director of UNICEF Anthony Lake in Project Syndicate, 27 January 2017.

The year 2016 will probably be remembered for military and political events, but it should also go down in history as one of the worst years for children since World War II. Images of dead, injured, and distraught young children filled the media on an almost daily basis: a small boy sitting stunned and bleeding after his home was bombed; small bodies being lifted out of rubble; and small graves on the Mediterranean shoreline that mark the deaths of unknown children.

These images are powerful and uncomfortable. And yet they cannot capture the magnitude of children's suffering. More than 240 million children are living in conflict zones – from the killing fields of Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and northern Nigeria, to less well-documented but horror-stricken areas of Somalia, South Sudan, and Afghanistan. And of the 50 million children who live outside their own countries or have been internally displaced, more than half have been forcibly uprooted, and are facing new threats to their lives and well-being.

Millions of children are undernourished and out of school; millions have witnessed unspeakable brutality; and millions are threatened with exploitation, abuse, and worse. This is not rhetoric; it is reality.

The United Nations – with support from countries such as Sweden, and by working through a coordinated humanitarian-response system that includes UNICEF – is alleviating suffering whenever and wherever it can. But the quantity and complexity of cascading crises are testing that system as never before. New challenges, such as extremism, are increasing the risks to

children, and making it more difficult and dangerous to reach them. Meanwhile, armed groups are increasingly targeting schools, hospitals, and homes, and compounding innocent people's suffering.

Political solutions to these conflicts are the surest way to stop the suffering and bring an end to such savage violations of human rights. But, barring that ideal outcome, we need to strengthen the current humanitarian system's capacity to reach the children at greatest risk.

More than 70 years ago, world leaders addressed the unprecedented humanitarian crisis following World War II by creating new institutions to bring immediate assistance to those in need. These new global entities laid the foundation for a future based on cooperation, dialogue, and results, rather than conflict, disaster, and ruin.

That was a turning point in world history; we have now arrived at another one. We need to summon the same spirit of solidarity and creativity today that inspired previous generations, not by founding new institutions, but by finding new ways of responding to the hard realities of our own time.

For starters, we urgently need to harness innovation to expand our capacity to reach children who are cut off from assistance in besieged areas or communities controlled by extremists. We should be exploring every option, such as using drones to airdrop food and medical supplies, and developing mobile apps to monitor needs and track supplies on the ground, and to keep aid workers safer. While there will never be a substitute for safe, unimpeded humanitarian access, we need to explore every avenue to reach children in danger.

More broadly, we must do a better job of coordinating among governments and organizations to provide short-term and long-term relief more efficiently, and to make every dollar count. With chronic crises proliferating, we should be maximizing synergies between humanitarian and development initiatives, because the two go hand in hand. How we respond in emergencies lays a foundation for future growth and stability, and how we invest in development can help build resilience against future emergencies.

Lastly, we need to change how governments calibrate the critical aid that they provide to meet fluctuating needs. In recent years, as appeals for aid have escalated, countries undergoing domestic austerity have increasingly had to justify their foreign-aid outlays. Many donors have earmarked their aid funds for specific purposes. To be sure, such funds will always be an

indispensable tool in both humanitarian and development efforts; but in today's unpredictable environment, more flexible, long-term funding is critical.

"Core" funding, as it is known, enables the UN and nongovernmental organizations both to react more quickly in emergencies and to plan more strategically. Such funding allows us to provide life-saving help when people need it most, rather than having to wait for countries to respond to specific humanitarian appeals. This is especially important for addressing the "forgotten" crises that the media may have missed.

Sweden has long been a proponent of such flexible support for UN organizations, because it improves results. For this reason, Sweden's government recently decided to double its 2016 contribution to UNICEF's core funds. Now that the world is working together on a new global development agenda, we hope this practice will spread and inspire other governments to move more toward high-quality funding for humanitarian relief and sustainable development.

We must protect the rights, lives, and futures of the world's most vulnerable children. To the extent that we do that, we will help to determine our common future as well.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden raises the ambitions in the work for human rights

Published 10 December 2016 Updated 10 December 2016

Human Rights Day is observed every year on 10 December. It presents an opportunity to highlight the Government's distinct emphasis on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Developments over the past few decades have meant that more people than ever before enjoy their human rights, including access to education and health care, the right to work and to organise in trade unions, and to live with whomever they choose. Since the 1970s, many states have made the transition to democracy – at least as regards the introduction of multiparty systems and the conduct of regular elections. The majority of the world's states have acceded to the core human rights conventions. Sweden's foreign policy engagement has contributed to this development.

We are living in a world that is more uncertain than it has been for many years and in many places we can also see that progress is being undone.

In a growing number of countries, human rights and democracy are weakening. Authoritarian and repressive regimes are gaining more influence, both over their own citizens and in the world. A number of states, including Russia, Egypt and Turkey, have introduced legislation or taken measures that make it extremely difficult for independent actors and journalists to operate freely. A number of stable democracies have also shown disturbing populist tendencies and legislative trends that restrict freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

It is clear to us that the democratic space is shrinking.

A further factor in this downward trend is the ever-shrinking civil society

space. Human rights defenders and journalists are subjected to threats and harassment, and laws are enacted to make activities highlighting human rights violations, corruption, abuse of power or electoral fraud excessively difficult or indeed impossible. At the seminar on hate and threats against women journalists that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs co-hosted with media institute FOJO, the Swedish Institute and UNESCO, it became very apparent just how vulnerable and exposed journalists – and particularly women journalists – are as a result of exercising their profession.

Perhaps the greatest challenge when it comes to human rights is that the universality of these rights is increasingly being called into question. Cultural or historical contexts are cited that enable the meaning of rights to be interpreted differently depending on where in the world a person lives or was born. This is an unfortunate trend that Sweden will forcefully counter. This is particularly relevant with regard to women's enjoyment of their human rights. For example, about 100 states place restrictions on the types of jobs women can do.

For the Government, it goes without saying that human rights are everyone's rights and thereby universal.

Economic, social and cultural rights are given higher priority than ever before. The right to education and health, and to health care and work are just as important as the freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly and other civil and political rights.

Today, access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is a globally contested issue. Forces that want to restrict these rights are gaining strength in many places. More and more, it is a matter of not regressing, for example, on the issue of sex and relationship education, which has a huge bearing on the prevention of violence against women and girls.

It is clear that gender equality issues remain controversial in many parts of the world. This is why we will continue to pursue our feminist foreign policy and focus on issues related to women's equal rights.

The negative developments we see, where human rights, democracy and the rule of law are questioned and challenged in all parts of the world, place new demands on Sweden. This requires strategic analysis and a new approach – but also integrated activity-oriented policies.

This is why the Government is now submitting a written communication

to the Riksdag on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This communication will be our compass for action in the coming years, presenting the Government's priorities and tools. The communication is also unique in that it addresses the development of human rights in every region of the world.

The Government has also appointed an Ambassador for Human Rights to have overall responsibility for the implementation of the communication and to be the messenger of Sweden's human rights, democracy and rule of law policy.

The EU project is more important than ever in a world following a repressive course. It is essential for the credibility of the EU that we practise what we preach; this is why Sweden will continue to push for human rights, democracy and the rule of law both within the EU and externally.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also has an important role to play here with its clear emphasis on human rights, democracy and the rule of law as a prerequisite for sustainable peace and security in Europe.

The UN continues to be one of our most important platforms, and Sweden's imminent entry as a non-permanent member of the Security Council is extremely important for our work. The UN Human Rights Council and other UN bodies Sweden is involved in are important arenas. In each of these forums we intend to continue to pursue policies that are firmly anchored in human rights, democratic values and the rule of law.

Our development cooperation has a strong emphasis on democracy and gender equality, increased respect for human rights and freedom from oppression. The coming policy framework for Swedish development cooperation establishes that human rights and democracy are two of the most important priorities in this area. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency has been especially tasked with examining the issue of shrinking civil society space and proposing measures that Sweden can take to counter this. The report is to be submitted in the first half of 2017.

As a further step in putting this enhanced ambition into practice, we are conducting a freedom of opinion and expression campaign in connection with the 250th anniversary of Sweden's Freedom of the Press Act. Next year, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs will present reports on human rights,

democracy and the rule of law in countries in all regions of the world.

Sweden has a proud history of working for human rights throughout the world. This is a tradition the current Government will strengthen. Our seat on the UN Security Council offers a unique opportunity to fight for these issues in a world that more than ever before needs a clear voice for the equal value and rights of all people.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

A Better Global Framework to End AIDS

Published 05 December 2016 Updated 05 December 2016

Opinion piece in Project Syndicate 2 December 2016 by Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, and Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS.

This week, we celebrate the tremendous progress that has been made in the struggle against HIV and AIDS. In many countries with strong health systems, HIV is no longer a death sentence, but a chronic condition. And Africa has reached a critical milestone: each year, there are now more Africans starting HIV treatment than being infected.

Still, even as we celebrate, we must also mourn the 1.1 million people who lost their lives to the disease this year. HIV still infects 6,000 people every day, and AIDS remains a leading cause of death among children, adolescents, and women in Africa.

The movement against AIDS has inspired all of us to help the people who continue to be left behind, and to commit to ending AIDS once and for all. Fortunately, we already have the know-how, resources, and, crucially, the political momentum to do this; and at the High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS this year, United Nations member states made ambitious commitments that will put us on the fast track toward our goal.

What's more, in September, Canada hosted a successful financing conference for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, which brought in almost \$13 billion, replenishing the Global Fund for 2017-2019. Meanwhile, individual countries have increased their domestic investments, and international partners – big and small – have maintained their support, which is how we will reach the \$26 billion needed for the

global AIDS response in 2020.

But funding parts of the global health system is not enough. The international community must take a more holistic view and reinforce a global-response architecture that features a clear division of labor and seamless cooperation among various stakeholders. Ultimately, the goal of such a framework must be to support countries' own health systems, by marshaling public and private actors at all levels in a given country, so that every facility – from the public hospital in the capital to the village clinic – is properly provisioned.

Sweden is proud to continue its support for the Global Fund; at the replenishment conference in September, it pledged 2.5 billion krona (\$271 million). The Global Fund is by far the largest multilateral source of financing for efforts to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria; but just like the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (now known as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance), it is part of a global architecture, and relies on a range of partners to deliver aid effectively. So, if country-level support for other global-health organizations – such as UNAIDS, the World Health Organization, and the UN Development Programme – dries up, continued progress in the fight against HIV and AIDS will be at risk.

Providing the necessary support will require donors to coordinate with one another, so that all parts of the existing architecture for managing global health issues are adequately funded. This will then ensure that all countries – and, more importantly, all people – receive the support they need.

UNAIDS is setting a powerful example for international collaboration, by organizing partners around a common 2016-2021 Strategy to end AIDS. This unique and innovative partnership brings together 11 co-sponsoring UN agencies, each with diverse sector-specific expertise, and mobilizes various government stakeholders. Partners include business, community, and faith leaders, as well as teachers, judges, members of law enforcement, parliamentarians, and many others outside the health sector whose actions nonetheless affect health outcomes.

One of UNAIDS' tasks is to encourage national governments to keep AIDS high on their public-health agendas, and to invest in joint efforts to end the disease. It is also the only organization with a mandate to set norms and standards for the global response to AIDS, which means that it plays a key role in the current international framework.

UNAIDS maintains a close partnership with the Global Fund. It has a

presence in more than 80 countries, and its regional teams provide technical support and strategic information, which helps the Global Fund direct its grants to the right programs, locations, and populations at sufficient scale. Moreover, it helps to create the social, legal, and political conditions for people to use health services, not least by promoting gender equality and ensuring that populations at higher risk of contracting HIV do not face adverse discrimination.

UNAIDS engages with civil society at all levels, by leveraging the international AIDS response to promote equality, dignity, and human rights around the world. As such, UNAIDS works to expand the political space for – and investment in – civil society.

Yet, despite its broad mandate and many functions, UNAIDS lacks adequate resources, which threatens past achievements and future programs alike, and poses a danger to people and communities that depend on the lifesaving support the organization helps facilitate.

Sweden and UNAIDS will work together to ensure that the international AIDS response continues to transform – and save – lives. We will safeguard and empower women and girls, and make sure that vulnerable populations' voices are heard. But, at the same time, the international community must strengthen the existing framework for managing global-health issues.

As Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven said in Montreal in September: "Today we are focusing on the Global Fund, but tomorrow let's not forget to provide sufficient funding for the entire global health architecture." It is time for the international community to meet that challenge, by pledging to support our global health infrastructure, so that no agency – and no country or person – is left out.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

To End Sexual Violence In Conflict, Women Must Be Agents of Change

Published 21 June 2016 Updated 21 June 2016

For the past year I have visited conflict zones from Afghanistan to Somalia, Lebanon, Liberia and South Sudan. In each of these countries it has been the human stories that stick with me, both those related to sexual- and gender-based violence and those of courageous women and men committed to promoting peace and development.

Sunday is the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. This date will mark an occasion for the international community to increase accountability, raise awareness, and demonstrate its resolve to address this crime. The UN's grim estimate is that roughly 35 percent of women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives—this figure is even higher in conflict zones. This compels us to work together, in partnership, because the challenges we face today in relation to the systemic and widespread use of sexual violence in conflict are extraordinary.

All forms of violence, but perhaps sexual violence more than most, have a negative impact on both the individual and society. While more men and boys are killed in direct conflict-related violence, women and girls are more exposed to conflict-related sexual violence. Widespread sexual violence during and after conflicts undermines the chances for sustainable peace and security whereas women's empowerment enhances it. We now know that when women are part of the process, peace negotiations are more successful

and peace is more sustainable.

I am proud to represent the first explicitly feminist government in the world, and one that has been at the forefront of advocating for greater attention to women, peace and security. We are convinced that gender equality is the foundation of sustainable peace and development, and that gender-based violence needs to be addressed head-on as part of the efforts to build peace.

We are not alone. The Call to Action on Protection from Gender Based Violence in Emergencies initiative was launched by Sweden and the U.K. with the aim of building a truly global coalition to prevent gender-based violence. Today, more than 50 partners have joined. We are particularly keen to see states from the south join us to share experiences and knowledge on this subject.

But political consensus now needs to be turned into consistent action. Of the 1,168 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2013, less than a fifth refers to women or gender. While over 100 countries around the world now have specific laws aimed at tackling violence against women, this kind of protection and recourse simply isn't available to the millions of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict zones. The international community must support conflict-affected states in filling that void.

To this end, we must shift the focus from women as victims, to women as agents of change, and strengthen the link between women's economic empowerment, women's political participation, and the full enjoyment of their human rights. This will mean transforming institutions, and changing norms and behavior.

There is also a final, overarching challenge: engaging with men and boys. Violence against women is not a women's issue. Engaging men in the fight against sexual violence is key. Men and boys can be drivers of change. They need to be involved and take responsibility. Although the Democratic Republic of Congo is perhaps better known for its many cases of conflict-related sexual violence, it is in fact home to many successful strategies for engaging men in preventing violent male behavior, including as group education and mentorship programmes for ex-combatants and military officers. These programmes focus on positive masculinities as a strategy to initiate a change of behavior. I am proud to say that Sweden supports this work.

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, led by the g7+ group of fragile and conflict affected states, the donor community and civil society is now putting gender equality issues at the forefront of its peacebuilding efforts. In our "New Deal" initiative and on the ground in conflict-affected states we are seeing this bear fruit. In Togo, for instance, where gender rights groups were specifically brought in by the government to take part in the country's post conflict fragility assessment—a key part of the New Deal process.

As co-chair of the International Dialogue, I am proud to say that our Stockholm Declaration from May this year has made a strong commitment to U.N. Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. The importance of women's participation and partnership with women's organizations must now be on top of our agenda.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

First Generation to Eradicate Poverty

Published 09 June 2016 Updated 09 June 2016

Opinion piece by the Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, and Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin and the Minister for Education, Gustav Fridolin in The Huffington Post, 9 June 2016.

The last decades hundreds of millions of people have left extreme poverty. Today more than 90 percent of all children are enrolled in school, even in developing countries. Thanks to digitalization we are more closely interconnected with each other than ever before. Knowledge and ideas flow throughout the world and transcend all previous boundaries.

At the same time, the world is younger than ever. Almost half of the world's population is younger than 25. Together, we now have a unique opportunity to continue creating a better, more sustainable future. And we have recently taken some important steps. Last year, 2015, the world came together to agree on three milestones: the climate agreement in Paris, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda for financing development and not least the UN Agenda 2030.

With the Agenda 2030, for the first time in history the world has one, integrated agenda for both development and environmental sustainability. We can't have one without the other. Poverty eradication without respect for the ecosystems and the planets limited resources is a dead end. This creates new visions, new possibilities — and challenges.

But we all know that plans and visions are not enough. The urgency of

putting words into action is underlined when we consider the climate change, the refugee crisis, the growing number of conflicts and wars, the threat of global terrorism, fundamentalism and hate speech, or the fact that more than one billion people are still lacking electricity. It is obvious that the world so far has failed to deal with the greatest challenges of our time.

The world needs countries that are willing to lead the way toward the fulfillment of the Agenda 2030. We are proud to declare that Sweden is committed to be such a country. Four areas are especially important in fulfilling the agenda:

- Including youth. This spring, Sweden launched the global campaign "#Firstgeneration." First Generation implies the generations and civil society actors who, thanks to digitalization, have access to networks and new knowledge and thus have a unique opportunity to use the 2030 Agenda and the global goals to build new solutions for a sustainable future — a future that can end poverty! Around the world we will organize activities and collaborations including everything from innovation competitions, university activities to social-media initiatives. A key target group is the teachers around the world. The crucial role of teachers in society, as well as their position as role models and sources of inspiration, gives them unique opportunities to pursue sustainability issues and influence our future.
- Climate. Sweden is committed to become one of the first fossil-free welfare nations in the world. Sweden used to be a country very dependent on fossil fuels. Since the oil crises in the '70s, we have been working systematically to reduce energy consumption and to increase the share of renewables. During the same period our economy has developed very fast. We opt for sustainable-energy sources for the sake of the climate, but also because it is economically sound. We believe it is much smarter to be the first one to enter the new economy, rather than being the last one depending on old solutions. Sweden is also the largest per capita contributor to the Green Climate Fund.
- Feminism. Sweden is the first country in the world to pursue a feminist foreign policy. Ensuring that women and girls can enjoy their fundamental human rights is both an obligation within the framework of our international commitments and a prerequisite for sustainable development. Investing in gender equality and promoting opportunities for non-traditional education and career choices for both boys and girls is of utmost importance. Investing in girls' education in particular is one of the most effective measures to promote gender equality and to contribute to economic and social development.

- Coherence. Coherence is a fundamental part of the Agenda. Sweden has a long tradition of working with policy coherence for global sustainable development, through what we call Policy for Global Development. Every Ministry has to produce its own action plans on how to achieve greater policy coherence for development. The Government recently appointed a multi-stakeholder National Committee to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda throughout Swedish society. The responsibility includes conducting an assessment of the extent to which Sweden fulfills the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, submitting a proposal for an overarching action plan for Sweden's implementation and working to include all relevant actors. Civil society organizations, municipalities, academia, private sector and trade unions are essential in this endeavour, since we know that every part of the society needs to work together if we are to succeed.

We now have 15 years ahead of us to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030. We are convinced that it is possible to achieve the goals and to create a better future for us all. But we need to get to work at once, and we need to do it together. We are convinced UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is right: We are the first generation that could end poverty and the last one to limit climate change. Let us jointly rise to that challenge.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Isabella Lövin on DN debatt

Published 26 May 2016 Updated 26 May 2016

When I took office in October 2014 as Minister for International Development Cooperation after more than five years in the European Parliament, many people asked me how it felt to 'switch' issues. In the European Union, I had worked mostly with fisheries policy, and at this point I would be dealing with development issues. In retrospect, I can see that the switch was not as dramatic as one might believe.

Fisheries, the world's oceans, the climate, inequality, poverty, the refugee situation and conflict issues – they are all interrelated. The political challenges facing the world are so tightly interwoven that they cannot be addressed individually. They require a common approach, and when we look at the world around us, it is clear that up to now we have failed to find such an approach.

Earlier in the week I took part in the UN World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul. Sixty million people in the world are displaced, and 125 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Not only are there more international crises, they have also become more protracted. The average time spent by a refugee in a refugee camp is now 17 years. In which case, sending food and blankets is hardly enough.

War and conflicts risk being exacerbated and prolonged by more extreme climate change. The average global temperature is currently rising at an alarming rate. Heat records were set globally in both 2014 and 2015. And all the evidence suggests that 2016 will be even warmer. Arctic ice is melting at record speed. The poorest people will be hit hardest when storms, flooding and drought become more commonplace.

At the same time, one billion people still lack access to electricity. This is a crucial obstacle to fulfilling a number of other fundamental human rights, such as access to functioning systems for water and sanitation, or lamps for doing homework in the evenings.

We must resolve these challenges without creating new problems in the process. We must deal with these issues jointly, rather than seeing them as separate problems to be solved individually. It may sound obvious, but it means we must rethink a number of areas.

When we support countries to build energy solutions and infrastructure for the billions of people who lack access to these today, an opportunity then opens up to step straight into the future and not lock these countries up in yesterday's mindset of dependence on fossil fuels. We must ensure that all investments – not only money from the climate funds – are used for sustainable solutions.

The same applies in Sweden. All investments, all trade and all policies must be sustainable, both in Sweden and abroad. Housing that we build today should also function in a future fossil-free Sweden. Infrastructure, railways and agriculture must also work well in a future in which we have stopped overexploiting the Earth's resources. Sweden must be at the forefront of innovations and climate-smart solutions that give Swedish companies export advantages in new growth markets.

The dividing line between domestic and foreign policy has become increasingly blurred. The global refugee situation, climate change and the financial crisis are examples of global phenomena that set the agenda for Swedish domestic policy. The distinction between developing countries and industrialised countries is also increasingly outdated; obviously there are still poor and rich countries, but policy is now so interwoven that all countries and all policy areas must contribute to sustainable development.

More and more people are beginning to see this mutual dependence. In the past year, the world adopted a historic climate agreement in Paris, new UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development up to 2030 and a framework for how to fund these efforts. Economic, social and environmental developments must go hand in hand. If we do not succeed in tackling these challenges in parallel, we will fail in all three.

The new UN Agenda for Sustainable Development applies to all countries and all policy areas, not only to 'poor' countries and not only to development

cooperation. In Sweden, we have been working since 2003 on Sweden's Policy for Global Development, which states that all policy areas are to contribute together to sustainable development in the world, because fair trade, tax evasion, environmental or migration policy are just as important for global development as development aid. As Minister for International Development Cooperation, I have not only had the primary responsibility for development aid, but also for coordinating the Policy for Global Development to ensure that all parts of the Government Offices are working towards a common goal.

Sweden is at the forefront of international development cooperation, both as a donor in terms of percentage of GNI and with regard to the quality and effectiveness of development aid. We are also leaders in the area of climate change, as the world's largest per capital donor to the UN's Green Climate Fund, by taking the lead at home with regard to investing in building of a green society and by putting a price on emissions.

Sweden will continue to be an international role model in the areas of both climate and development, and by regarding the two areas as parts of a whole we can achieve even more. We are showing that it is possible to unite economic development with reduced emissions.

For this reason, Sweden is now taking one more step to be at the forefront by appointing a minister for international development cooperation and climate. I will be responsible for international climate policy in addition to aid policy. Responsibility for daily work on these issues will be divided between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Environment. I will also carry the title of Deputy Prime Minister. The concept of international development cooperation is more accurate than development aid, since the activities we are carrying out are more about creating conditions for development in cooperation with countries, institutions and civil society than about Sweden sending money to a passive recipient.

As Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, I will be responsible – together with the new Minister for the Environment, Karolina Skog, and other colleagues in the Government – for making Sweden one of the first fossil-free welfare nations in the world. By taking responsibility for our climate at home, Sweden will demonstrate leadership in the global arena.

We must do this together. Throughout society today, there is a strong push for progress towards greater sustainability. The framework of the Fossil-free

Sweden initiative brings together hundreds of companies, municipalities, regions, and associations that want to work together towards the vision of making Sweden one of the world's first fossil-free welfare nations.

In politics, too, there are many opportunities for cooperation across party lines. Earlier this year, seven Riksdag parties agreed to introduce a climate policy framework to ensure that emissions are kept within sustainable limits. The parties are currently discussing energy systems of the future within the framework of the Commission on Energy, and there is also a broad consensus across party lines on Sweden's Policy for Global Development.

During my years at the European Parliament, I managed, together with representatives of a number of other parties, to help reform EU fisheries policy and radically improve prospects for our oceans to recover from the overfishing that has gone on for many decades. We achieved this by listening to each other and focusing on common interests, rather than by looking for differences of opinion. I believe that Swedish policy would gain from more cooperation and less disagreement for the sake of disagreement.

"We are the first generation that can wipe out poverty and the last one that can halt climate change." These words were spoken by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and are a good summary of our greatest task. So let us begin.

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, and Deputy Prime Minister



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Access to the life-saving services of a midwife is a gender rights issue

Published 05 May 2016 Updated 05 May 2016

Opinion piece by the Minister for International Development Cooperation, Isabella Lövin in The Guardian on the International Day of the Midwife, May 5, 2016.

In the mid-18th century, the maternal mortality rate in Sweden approached 900 deaths for every 100,000 births. A hundred years later, the introduction of professional midwives had contributed to the rate being pushed down to 230. Today, four women die per 100,000 live births.

This goes to show that the midwifery profession and workforce have the power to save thousands of lives each year. Unfortunately, not everyone gets to enjoy the benefits of that power. Although global maternal and infant mortality rates have dropped by half since 1990, about 800 women and girls worldwide still die from pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications each day. Almost all of them, 99%, die in developing countries. Every day there are more than 8,200 stillbirths and, each year, 2.8 million babies die within the first six weeks of life.

These figures are troubling in themselves, but the fact that the majority of these deaths could have been prevented with the help of qualified midwives and doctors makes the situation even more frustrating. Added to that is a persistent and – in some places – growing resistance to the human rights of women, not least among violent extremist groups, who make the control of women's lives, bodies and reproduction a central part of their ideology and rhetoric. Women's human rights can never be taken for granted.

To help spread the word about the major part played by midwives in sexual and reproductive health, the Swedish foreign ministry teamed up with the International Confederation of Midwives to launch the Midwives4All initiative. Our aim is to strengthen women's human rights, improve access to health services and resources for women, and increase female representation. This year we're celebrating the heroism of midwives by acknowledging those whose efforts make a real difference. Our excellence in midwifery award is open to healthcare workers in 14 countries around the world.

Midwives not only improve the chance of a safe pregnancy and delivery, but also provide the full continuum of care throughout a woman's life. By doing so, they play a key role in the empowerment of women and building sustainable societies. Access to a midwife is a big and important step in achieving sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. These rights are crucial for gender equality and are not merely a health issue.

Sweden has a feminist government and sexual and reproductive health and rights are seen as central to the struggle for women's human rights. If women and girls can't control their own bodies, decide whether or not to have sex with someone, and choose who to marry and when to have children, how can they participate on equal terms as men in society?

Sweden has a long tradition of being at the forefront on these matters, and up to 60% of Swedish development cooperation for health goes to promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights. In 2014, it amounted to 2.3bn Swedish kronor (£197m).

We promote more and better midwife training, strengthened legislation, increased recognition of the profession, and better information on the role midwives play. Swedish aid helps women and girls in countries where maternal mortality is highest. During my trips as a minister in Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan, I have seen how this work saves lives and build better capacity for the future. In Bangladesh, Swedish midwives, in close cooperation with local authorities, have helped to build up a new profession from the ground.

We have the policy and the mindset to drive change for the better, but first and foremost we have the opportunity. Through the ambitious goals of the 2030 agenda, two of which explicitly relate to sexual and reproductive health and rights, world leaders have already agreed to invest in gender equality. Partly because it is the right thing to do, but also because, when

women and girls can educate themselves and find a job they like, they bring economic development. This pays off: if every country matched the most gender-equal country in its region in terms of access to the labour market, the global GDP would increase by 11%.

Gender equality can truly be the key to ending poverty.



Addressing the displacement crisis

Published 04 April 2016 Updated 04 April 2016

Our world today is experiencing a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions. More people than ever – over 125 million – are in need of emergency aid. Over 60 million people, more than half of them children, worldwide have fled their homes as a result of conflict and persecution, many of them trapped for decades without any possibility to learn, work and build a future. The crisis has touched almost every region of the globe, including Europe. But even though Europe has recently seen a staggering increase of asylum-seekers, developing countries are still host to over eight in ten of the world's refugees.

The international community needs to step up in order to face these challenges. That is why next week's ministerial meeting, the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State Building in Stockholm, and the first ever World Humanitarian Summit coming up in May in Istanbul are extremely important as they offer opportunities for political leadership and action.

While receiving countries and communities struggle to shelter the world's forcibly displaced, those who help often do not have the means to do so. Humanitarian organisations like UNHCR have been warning for years that funding is insufficient to cover the rapidly growing needs. With humanitarian appeals regularly underfunded by some 50 per cent, not only do millions of people go without some of the most basic human necessities, but they also are not given the tools they need to rebuild their lives and become self-reliant. To break this vicious cycle, several things are needed.

- Most importantly, peace. We must stop the violent conflicts that are pushing tens of thousands of people to flee every single day, and prevent new ones from breaking out. Fifteen conflicts have erupted or reignited in the last five years alone, displacing millions of people. Almost half of all peace agreements in the world fail within five years. We need to build stronger partnerships, coordinate better and target development aid more efficient. During the Stockholm meeting, gathering leaders from conflict affected countries as well as donors, civil society and UN agencies, participants will agree on a "new deal for peace" to more effectively prevent armed conflict and extinguish the flames of conflict before they threaten the social, economic and political fabric of societies.
- Unearmarked funding. There is also an urgent need for more, more flexible and more predictable, resources. The world is unpredictable in so many ways that humanitarian funding should not be. Unearmarked support enhances efficiency, lowers administrative costs and allows humanitarian organisations to be flexible and quickly respond to emergencies. Sweden is UNHCR's largest donor of unearmarked support, increasing its core contribution to 715 million SEK this year. This flexible funding has been key in enabling a rapid response to recent displacement crises in Central African Republic, South Sudan, northern Iraq, Ukraine and Nigeria. But overall, an increasing share of international humanitarian funding is tied to specific activities – only 15 per cent of UNHCR's total funding last year was unearmarked. Restricting the use of humanitarian funding risks slowing down responses, politicising aid and hitting people affected by forgotten crises the hardest. A High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing convened recently by the UN Secretary-General recommended that donors increase the share of unearmarked funding to 30 per cent of their contributions in line with the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship. We fully support this proposal and hope others will as well.
- Opportunities for jobs and education. In crisis after crisis, refugees get stuck in camps for decades. Humanitarian aid has long stopped being a short-term measure, with many of the world's refugee situations now lasting on average some 20 years. Millions of displaced and stateless children risk growing up as a lost generation, with no chance to get an education, jobs or citizenship. This is not only unjust, unsustainable and an enormous loss to themselves and their societies, it also risks generating new tensions and displacement, and increases young people's vulnerability for exploitation, including by extremist groups. Education and access to livelihoods are crucial elements of conflict prevention, and

should be a central focus of more closely interlinked humanitarian and development programmes. In Syria and elsewhere, Sweden and UNHCR are looking into new strategies to create such opportunities.

- Include women and local voices. National and local actors are often the first responders to humanitarian emergencies, and they are also the last to leave. To build stronger partnerships with these actors is key to find lasting solutions to protracted refugee crises and to make refugees and host communities more resilient and less dependent on aid. Women and their representatives are particularly important in this regard, but too often their voices go unheard. Women face specific risks, often carry the bulk of daily responsibilities, and can play an important mediating role in communities. Their knowledge and experiences are essential to delivering efficient aid and building lasting peace.

As we prepare for the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next month, many of these issues will be put on the agenda, in a common effort to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian action for the benefit of the world's most vulnerable people. Changing the way things are done is never quick or easy. It requires innovative thinking, political commitment, adequate resources and genuine cooperation. But it is possible, as we saw last December when – in the face of increasing concern over the acceleration of global warming – world leaders agreed to sign the Paris climate deal. Today's humanitarian crisis is no less worrying, and its effects are both immediate and long-term. Addressing it will need a similar level of resolve and cooperative spirit, based on the recognition that in today's globalized world, human suffering, although caused by conflicts raging far away, ends up affecting us all.

Isabella Lövin is the Minister for International Development Cooperation of Sweden.

Filippo Grandi is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden gives SEK 350 million in additional emergency aid Syria crisis

Published 04 February 2016 Updated 04 February 2016

Opinion piece by Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation. Expressen 4th of February 2016.

The war in Syria will soon enter its fifth year. There are alarming reports about how winter is hitting the refugees in Syria, who do not have enough warm clothes and shoes, and images of emaciated people bear witness to how starvation is being used as a strategy of war. More than 400 000 people are starving in besieged cities. This is completely unacceptable, and the people responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes must be held to account. Some 13.5 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian aid or have been forced to flee from their homes. Sweden was a driving force in the adoption of the UN resolutions on increased humanitarian access, and we are now pushing for them to be respected. At the international donors conference that opens in London today, Sweden will pledge an additional SEK 350 million in emergency assistance to those affected by the war in Syria.

But humanitarian aid is not enough. Many people have given up hope of a decent future. This is equally true of those who have chosen or been forced to stay in Syria and those who have fled to neighbouring countries. They have very few possibilities to work, and far too many children are unable to attend school. This is a very troubling situation.

A political solution is necessary to bring an end to the conflict. It is therefore

encouraging that the peace negotiations in Geneva were initiated, even though they are currently suspended and it will take time to achieve a solution to the conflict. The intensified Russian bombings and the world's inability to make the Assad regime conform to the Security Council's demands for an end to sieges and bombings of civilians, full humanitarian access to the civilian population, and the release of political prisoners have played a major role in jeopardising the now suspended peace talks.

The donors conference in London is crucial in mobilising support for all the people affected by the horrors of the war and to offer hope to underpin future peace. The UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura has our wholehearted support. To increase the prospects of success in the discussions in Geneva, we are also giving substantial support to increase women's participation and influence in the negotiations.

The international community must try to inspire hope and support existing positive forces. We are therefore taking both a pledge to increase humanitarian aid and Sweden's new Syria crisis strategy, encompassing initiatives totalling SEK 1.7 billion, with us to London. Sweden is the first country to adopt a long-term strategy for the Syria crisis, and it is a model that we believe more countries should emulate. The strategy aims to mitigate the effects of the conflict in both Syria and neighbouring countries. During the conference we will push for more countries to increase aid in five areas that are central to Sweden's Syria strategy:

1. People in Syria and neighbouring countries must have increased opportunities to support themselves. Being able to support oneself inspires hope, and reduces the risks of forced marriage, forced labour and recruitment to terrorist groups, thus having an impact on all of our safety. In neighbouring countries, it can reduce tensions between refugees and local people, and offer people dignity and faith in the future. It also maintains and builds on people's skills, which is important for the future.
2. More people must have access to community services in Syria and in neighbouring countries. This means more children attending school, and access to water, sanitation and health care for more people. More than three million children are not going to school, and the number is increasing. There is an impending risk of child labour and recruitment of child soldiers. If we do not take strong action, we risk creating a lost generation, which will hamper reconstruction.
3. The courageous civil society organisations that remain in Syria, negotiating local truces, working for dialogue and documenting crimes

against human rights, need more support. Sweden is currently one of the few donors to such organisations.

4. Work to prevent violence against women and girls and ensure that victims of sexual violence receive rehabilitation and care must be given more resources.
5. Women must be able to participate in peace processes on equal terms with men. Sweden gives concrete support to women's participation in the Geneva negotiations and to women who are active in local peace efforts on the ground in Syria. More countries need to do more to ensure that half of Syria's population is not excluded from the peace process.

We hope that the London conference will result in a considerable increase in support from the rest of the world to those affected in Syria. Nonetheless, aid will not end the war. That will require a political solution, and the defeat of the terrorist organisation Daesh. But used wisely, aid can lay the foundations for a future peace. It also offers a lifeline to many people, and it can inspire faith in the future and show that the international community has not forgotten them.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström

Minister for International Development Cooperation Isabella Lövin



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Swedish aid has given us influence

Published 14 December 2015 Updated 15 December 2015

Opinion piece by Minister for International Development Cooperation Isabella Lövin in SVD 14th of December

While the world around us is being torn apart by a growing number of wars and conflicts, last weekend world leaders agreed on a climate agreement with substantially higher ambitions to save the planet from the worst effects of global warming, effects that would drive hundreds of millions of people into poverty.

It gives hope in an otherwise difficult time. Sweden played a crucial role in the final stage of the climate negotiations through several important mediations. The fact that we were given a mediator role is largely the result of being seen as a reliable aid donor and partner for poor countries. Swedish aid makes a difference – it has given us international influence.

It also enjoys wide and well-deserved support in society, which became clear in connection with the intense debate in recent months on possible cutbacks in aid. For this reason, Monday's parliamentary debate on the aid budget is so important.

This year, Sweden has received more refugees than ever before in modern times. At the same time, we continue to be one of the most generous aid donors in the world. The Government is now setting a limit – a maximum of 30 per cent of aid will be used to finance refugee reception in Sweden.

This demonstrates that the Government is safeguarding aid, even in exceptional times when the budget is strained. Without this limit, more than half of the aid could be used for refugee reception costs in Sweden next year under the current accounting model.

The Government also stands by its goal to use one per cent of gross national income (GNI) to combat poverty and oppression. Sadly, this is in contrast to the international trend, where an increasing number of donors are cutting back.

With limited resources available, we must prioritise, find our bearings in a changing world and directing aid to where it is most needed. I would venture to say that never before has aid been as important as it is now. The Government sees four areas where Sweden makes a difference, and where enhanced efforts are needed. Firstly, with regard to humanitarian disaster relief. Never before have more people been in need of disaster relief. The needs have doubled in five years and UN appeals only have half of their funding secured for humanitarian support this year. The number of wars and conflicts is increasing after decades of decline and a record number of people have been forced to flee their homes.

To meet these challenges, we will strengthen work in a number of areas in 2016. The Government will initiate a new five-year strategy for humanitarian work that reflects today's growing needs and also makes visible the situation of women and girls, which is all too often ignored today in international humanitarian work.

We will raise appropriations to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organisations working on the ground to help people in the neighbouring regions, and we will push for a more effective United Nations ahead of the global summit on humanitarian issues that will take place in Istanbul in May 2016. Secondly, and more importantly, we must get at the underlying factors forcing people to flee. The proportion of poor people in conflict-affected or fragile states is increasing. Today, more than 1.5 billion people live face-to-face with violence and insecurity, while the scope for democratic forces is shrinking in country after country and the oppression of women is increasing during and after conflicts.

Therefore, we will stress peacebuilding and statebuilding, with a strong focus on institution-building and inclusive, legitimate policy that builds on democratic principles with respect for human rights.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has already been tasked with including a conflict prevention perspective in all aid, and now we will give Sida an additional task to review how aid can better prevent armed conflicts and crises, and to present tangible proposals in April.

Thirdly, the lack of gender equality is one of the areas with the most acute needs, and where Swedish aid has long made a crucial difference. Access to schooling for girls and the right to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are still very much being fought for in many countries.

Girls are married off at an early age, deprived of their right to schooling, circumcised and forced to become mothers at an age when they themselves are scarcely more than children. This cements poverty and prevents major sections of the world's population from contributing their full capacity and lifting the world out of poverty. Not all donor countries acknowledge SRHR as an important issue, and in this context, Sweden has a key role. Last but not least: the climate issue, which is closely linked to issues concerning sustainable food production, water and energy supply and thereby also the issue of combating poverty, and peace and security. Climate change puts further pressure on already vulnerable countries and risks inflating and worsening unrest. At the weekend, world leaders took a decisive step by agreeing on a global climate agreement. However, if the agreement is to be worth something, it must also be put into practice.

Money must be channelled towards clean and renewable energy, rather than brown, fossil energy. We will therefore sharply increase our ambitions to support poor countries' investments in clean energy, which can lead to revolutionary development for the poorest people in remote villages and communities. Today, a total of 1.3 billion people in the world do not have access to any electricity.

Through the initiative Power Africa, Sweden will contribute small-scale, renewable energy solutions at a value of USD 1 billion by 2020. We will also give Swedfund a capital injection of SEK 400 million to begin work on renewable energy, and we are one of the largest donors to the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund and the Least Developed Countries Fund to help the poorest countries leapfrog into the future using adaptation and renewable energy.

At the same time, we know that international financial institutions such as the World Bank and others have been investing hundreds of billions in fossil energy for many years. This is, of course, no longer tenable as the world is aiming to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

To this end, the Government has produced a new plan to redirect investments in all international financial institutions, to adopt ambitious and scheduled goals to increase the share of renewable energy. When

international financial institutions decide on new energy projects, renewable energy is to be the first choice.

There are enormous sums of money at stake. In 2014, the World Bank alone loaned USD 9.5 billion to energy projects worldwide. Redirecting these investments to renewable energy would have enormous positive effects on international climate efforts.

Redirecting these investments to renewable energy would have enormous positive effects on international climate efforts.

Change is possible when the world successfully coordinates its forces. Aid is not a universal solution, but it does play an important strategic role. Swedish aid is world-class, not least thanks to the broad involvement of civil society organisations, trade unions, religious communities, municipalities and individual Swedes who want to make the world a better place.

I am tremendously pleased about this commitment, and I am convinced that by more clearly focusing our efforts on these strategic areas, Swedish aid will be even more important and relevant in a world that is moving ever faster.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Isabella Lövin: Opinion piece in Metro, 20 November

Published 19 November 2015 Updated 20 November 2015

Opinion piece in Metro, 20 November Mayana, aged 16, whom I meet at a Swedish-funded women's shelter in northern Afghanistan, talks about her husband's abuse: "My husband locked me in the cellar for several days without food, later I managed to escape, but now he has my four-year-old daughter."

Life is unimaginably difficult for many people where I am now. Security has deteriorated and the Taliban offensives and rising unemployment harm girls and compel boys to leave the country. Nearly two thousand unaccompanied children from Afghanistan arrived in Sweden in early November alone. As in all conflict-affected regions, it is the children who suffer most. Today is the UN Universal Children's Day, and I would like to spotlight all these girls and boys. As Minister for International Development Cooperation, I promise to do everything in my power to avoid lost generations growing up in conflict areas. To this end, we are stepping up our efforts for children's rights.

Aid has an important role to play in meeting the challenges the world currently faces. The number of wars and conflicts is on the rise again and more than 60 million people have fled their homes, around half of them children. I met some of them in Lebanon, on the border with Syria. They all wanted to go to school and indeed, the first thing their parents wanted to talk about was their concern about their children's education. UNICEF and other organisations that Sweden supports are on the spot and are offering lessons for children. Yet although they are working flat out, some 200 000 Syrian children in Lebanon alone are estimated not to be going to school. This is a challenge the international community has to tackle, not just in the wake of the Syria crisis, but also in other conflict areas. Children are the next

generation who will help build the future. If we lose them, we will lose the peace.

During and after conflicts, the risk of sexual violence and child marriage increases too, and this in turn drastically reduces the freedom of girls and their opportunities to participate in society. Moreover, boys and girls run the risk of being recruited and abducted by armed groups. In Somalia I recently met Ilwan and other women activists working to prevent more boys being recruited by the al-Shabaab terrorist group and to reintegrate those who have managed to escape its clutches. “The boys must be given an alternative,” they say – and I agree. These recruitments have more to do with economics and a lack of belief in the future than with ideology. Aid is one of the factors contributing to education and jobs, particularly in these fragile states where investors do not dare to get involved and the state apparatus has failed.

Sweden has a long tradition of standing up for children’s rights. We are now taking this further by giving child rights issues higher priority in future aid strategies, for example, in the upcoming strategy on the crisis in Syria. This also applies to the new aid policy framework that will be finalised in 2016.

It is our children who will take over what we leave. It is our responsibility to give them the best possible conditions, so that they are not forced to flee by perilous routes to an uncertain future. Like the children from Afghanistan.

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Debate article: How we will strengthen UN emergency and disaster response operations

Published 03 September 2015 Updated 03 September 2015

Swedish Daily Göteborgs Posten 3 September 2015 A number of reforms are now being launched to strengthen the UN. One of these is to provide support to a dozen or so UN bodies that work with everything from providing help to people in need and strengthening children's and women's rights to countering the effects of natural disasters, writes Minister for International Development Cooperation Isabella Lövin.

Every day, we are confronted with reports of the horrors of war that split communities and force people to flee, of extreme weather events that ruin opportunities for people to earn a living and growing extremism that fosters fear and insecurity. To meet these challenges, the international community must assume responsibility and take concerted action. The UN plays an important role in this and support to UN organisations is one of the Government's primary tools for contributing to sustainable development. Today the Government will therefore take decisions on organisational support, known as core support, to a dozen or so UN bodies that work with everything from providing help to people in need and strengthening children's and women's rights to countering the effects of natural disasters.

Sweden is one of the single largest donors to the UN and development banks such as the World Bank. This gives us a strong voice and the opportunity to influence important decisions on poverty reduction and climate issues. Sweden plays a key role in promoting gender equality work in the UN

system, which is of vital importance at a time when women's rights are encountering resistance.

A large proportion of Sweden's contributions to UN bodies is given in the form of organisational support, which means that the funds are paid into the organisations' budgets without being earmarked. This gives them greater flexibility and the possibility to plan their activities over the long term, while still being able to act quickly in the event of a crisis. Distressed and desperate people should not have to wait for each individual donor's analysis, grant management and, in the worst case, policy decisions before the response can be set in motion. Sweden's support enables immediate assistance for women, men, girls and boys who, in many cases, are fighting for their lives. As the largest donor of organisational support to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), we have helped it provide rapid and vital protection and help to people in places such as Ukraine, Iraq, the Philippines, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

The UN's work makes a difference for many people living in vulnerable situations. Through our support to UN Women, women and girls receive psychosocial support and protection from sexual violence in refugee camps in Iraq, Syria and South Sudan. In 2014, 18 million people in crisis and disaster situations received access to clean water and 150 000 girls in Syria were offered access to school clubs via the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

To strengthen and improve our work with UN bodies, we are implementing reform efforts within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that correspond to recommendations made by the Swedish National Audit Office. A number of reforms will be launched so that we can better promote more vigorous results in the UN and increase transparency and efficiency in case management. The Swedish people have a right to easily find out how aid is used and how appreciated their international solidarity is among people in both poor and rich countries. I bring this heartfelt appreciation home with me after every trip abroad.

The challenges and threats we are confronted with in media reports may appear overwhelming. However, the picture is not entirely bleak. Progress is being made on several fronts; the situation is improving for more and more people. World poverty has been halved, as has child mortality, and nine out of ten children are enrolled in primary education. The UN and the Millennium Development Goals to combat world poverty have played an important role in these successes.

In September, world leaders will adopt new global development goals that will replace the Millennium Development Goals. The new goals deal with everything from eradicating poverty, strengthening gender equality and promoting peaceful societies to renewable energy. The fact that world leaders are able to agree on these goals instils hope and offers tremendous opportunities.

The UN also has a key role in revitalising these goals and following up and coordinating the work. This requires reforms and, as a true friend of the UN, we have a responsibility to convey constructive criticism. The Government will use Sweden's influence to advance reform efforts for a UN that is better equipped to manage crises, safeguard human rights and promote sustainable development. We will also continue to develop our own work so that Swedish support is as relevant as possible and, in the most feasible manner, improve the living conditions for people living in poverty and oppression.

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden strengthens its humanitarian efforts

Published 19 August 2015 Updated 19 August 2015

Aftonbladet 19/8 Today is World Humanitarian Day. With 60 million people fleeing from war and violence, the international community is facing major challenges both in trying to resolve conflicts and in providing protection and support to people in distress.

Several of the current conflicts are a threat to international security. The refugee flows have made issues relating to solidarity a matter of urgency. Today we want to highlight the contributions Sweden is making to humanitarian efforts. The Government has decided to appoint a special envoy for humanitarian issues. This job has gone to Per Örnéus, a diplomat with considerable experience of foreign service. Per Örnéus will now, together with us, coordinate Sweden's contributions within the framework of humanitarian work.

The atrocities committed in Syria and Iraq by the terrorist organisation ISIL (or IS as it is also called) are examples of when terrorist groups act entirely arbitrarily. Civilians, including aid workers, are direct targets, and the war in Syria and Iraq is transgressing moral and geographical boundaries. We are now seeing a worrying global trend in which attacks on aid workers are increasing and it is becoming ever more difficult to reach people in distress. Limiting the effects of armed conflicts is now one of our greatest challenges.

The UN's current humanitarian system needs reforming. Sweden is the world's fifth largest bilateral humanitarian donor and we have high expectations of others to participate and contribute. It must be obligatory for countries to contribute to humanitarian work. In light of the worrying trend and the growing urgent needs, in spring 2016 the UN will host a

humanitarian summit for the international community to agree on necessary reforms.

The humanitarian system is on its knees. The UN's humanitarian appeals have grown fivefold since 2004, but last year financing levels only reached just over half of what was required. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently appointed a high-level panel to tackle the growing gap between humanitarian needs and available resources. As Minister for Foreign Affairs, I am a member of the high-level panel, and an additional six people from other countries contribute proposals and input for how the future humanitarian system is to be financed. Sweden will present concrete proposals based on our considerable experience.

We also need to better link together humanitarian measures with long-term development cooperation. The Government will shortly be adopting a new Syria crisis strategy, which will be a concrete example of how urgent humanitarian support can be linked to more long-term measures that also provide support to neighbouring countries affected by the conflict. Sweden has a role to play, both as chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission and in my role, as Minister for International Development Cooperation, as chair of the International Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding. During the autumn, the Government will also establish a Swedish civil society forum to make use of the expert knowledge available to better reach out to people in distress.

In the intermeshed world of today, war and conflicts affect us all. Sweden's long tradition of assisting people in distress is ultimately a sign of the Swedish people's international solidarity, but also a way to safeguard security for us all.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Strengthening democracy

Published 21 July 2015 Updated 21 July 2015

Svenska Dagbladet July 2 2015 Today, here in Almedalen, the Government has decided to step up cooperation with civil society in Sweden to reduce poverty and oppression in the world. Together, the Government and civil society organisations have drawn up joint commitments to enhance dialogue and collaboration in the area of development cooperation. Meanwhile, as these are being adopted, we witness country after country reducing the scope for independent organisations, human rights defenders and journalists. The Government will fight this trend and work to ensure that civil society organisations everywhere – not just in Sweden – are able to work freely.

Almedalen is a throng of social movements, organisations, political parties and businesses – a scene of Swedish democracy, where spontaneous meetings and discussions take place on the street between politicians, community stakeholders and private individuals. This openness is in stark contrast to what is happening beyond Sweden's borders. The progress the world has seen in recent decades, including more people who are able to vote and democracy gaining ground, has unfortunately been halted. More than 50 countries have adopted, or intend to adopt, legislation that will make it harder for civil society organisations to operate, for example by making it difficult to seek international support. The best-known case is Russia, but it is not the only one. The trend is spreading rapidly around the world – everywhere from Europe to the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and

Asia.

Organisations and human rights defenders with international contacts and financing are being dragged through the mud and denounced as foreign agents. This has devastating consequences for their ability to work and threatens their safety. For many organisations, cooperation for example with civil society organisations in Sweden is a lifeline providing both moral and financial support, and a channel to the outside world. Without it, it is difficult for them to carry out their important work. Without it, it also becomes more difficult for governments and international bodies to get a full picture of the situation in a country.

In many ways, civil society is the engine that drives society towards continuous improvement. This is certainly the case in Sweden, where civil society organisations have played, and still play, an important role in building our nation. It is civil society organisations and individual activists who warn us when companies commit environmental offences, when governments and authorities are corrupt, when women and children are abused and when political tensions risk leading to widespread violence and instability. The wave of restrictions we are now seeing means that the global network of civil society organisations, individuals and states is in danger of being replaced by something else: repressive states, less scope for people to organise and less cross-border contact.

It is crucial that Sweden acts as a counter force and that Swedish development cooperation is used to support the potential of civil society in the world, as well as human rights, democracy and the rule of law. I am proud that there is broad political consensus on this in the Riksdag and on the added value of Swedish civil society organisations and their role in the fight against poverty and oppression.

The joint commitments the Government and Swedish civil society organisations are adopting today are proof of this and a product of work begun during the previous government's last year in office and now completed by us.

We, the Swedish Government, are committed to defending the independence of civil society organisations, inviting dialogue and drawing on their knowledge, pushing for favourable conditions for their work and promoting their role as a collective voice and opinion former in Sweden and internationally. With the new direction of Sida's information and communication strategy the Government has recently established,

organisations will be able to do more than merely inform about the results of aid. We are opening up opportunities for them to seek means for reviewing, stimulating debate and public opinion on the challenges and opportunities of development work, and also for giving a voice to civil society in partner countries.

We will also concentrate more on strengthening democratic institutions in developing countries, for example legal systems, welfare systems, national audit organisations and anti-corruption mechanisms. This is extremely important. People and organisations do not live in a vacuum; they depend on a well-functioning state to be able to exercise their human rights.

We are also going to develop a new framework for the direction of aid and a written communication for human rights, democracy and the rule of law in foreign policy, both of which will be submitted to the Riksdag in 2016. In this context, the scope of civil society has an intrinsic place. We need new thinking to counteract global anti-democratic tendencies around the world. How can we best support the new emerging networks and movements that are being forced to find new ways to organise because of repressive regulations?

Our ambition is clear: the voices of civil society, human rights defenders and journalists must not be silenced. Almedalen may be criticised for being exclusive, gaudy and superficial, but in an international perspective the week here in Visby is a reminder of Sweden's openness and the opportunities we have for free debate and discussion – something that can never be taken for granted. In too many countries around the world a Democracy Week like the one we celebrate every year in Visby would be absolutely unthinkable. But the lack of openness and pluralism is what creates long-term instability in these countries. The Government's strengthened cooperation with civil society means we can create better conditions for sustainable development in our increasingly troubled world.

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

How Sweden wants to finance the world's 17 new development goals

Published 13 July 2015 Updated 14 July 2015

DN Debatt 13 of July 2015 Today, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, Minister for Financial Markets Per Bolund and I will arrive in Addis Ababa for the UN Financing for Development summit on how to finance the new global development goals.

To eradicate poverty and create an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable world, both public and private resources need to be used more smartly and invested in the right way. This work has top priority for the Government, and Sweden is playing an active part to ensure that this week's negotiations lead to a package of common measures.

Fifteen years ago the United Nations brought 147 heads of state and government together to agree on goals for global development efforts. These Millennium Development Goals were to be measurable and ambitious. They included eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education and ensuring sustainable development. These goals were incorporated by many developing countries in national plans.

Now, as the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals approaches, we can confirm that they have produced results. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has been more than halved. Nine out of ten children now attend primary school. This is a great success for global development efforts and an important step in combating extremism and injustice.

Yet much remains to be done. One billion people are still living in extreme poverty and 800 million go to bed hungry every day. The world is far from being gender equal: far too many women are denied the opportunity to

participate in the economy and working life, and millions die in childbirth. What is more, climate change risks wiping out all the progress made so far and hitting the poorest hardest.

In September world leaders will adopt 17 new global Sustainable Development Goals. These goals will be very ambitious and will range all the way from eradicating extreme poverty and hunger to achieving gender equality, peaceful societies, sustainable seas and sustainable consumption. They must be matched by an equally ambitious financing plan – which is what we have come to Addis Ababa to put together. A positive outcome this week will create a favourable negotiating climate, which is very important ahead of the adoption of the sustainability goals in September and the global climate change conference, COP21, in Paris in December.

The new goals differ from the old Millennium Development Goals in two important ways: the new goals target *all* countries, rather than just developing countries, and they establish a serious link between the poverty agenda and the environment and climate agenda. Some key issues that have been discussed ahead of the conference and will be very much to the fore are the level of development assistance, how less developed countries are to mobilise domestic resources, and how private capital can be invested in developing countries.

Sweden has everything to gain from developing countries being raised out of poverty. As a small, export-oriented nation, Sweden stands to be one of the big winners when global trade increases. Sweden's good reputation makes us a popular trade partner and, with a population drawn from much of the world, we have every opportunity to establish trade contacts in Africa and Latin America, for example. Consequently, sustainable global development will also boost the Swedish economy in the future.

The Government has high ambitions in the fight against climate change. Swedish carbon dioxide emissions, for example, have been reduced by 25 per cent since the beginning of the 1990s, thanks to effective policy levers and consistent environmental policies. To intensify international climate efforts, the Government has decided to allocate SEK 4 billion to the Green Climate Fund during the period 2015–2018. This is the most generous per capita contribution of all donor countries. In the area of development assistance, Sweden is one of the few countries that give 1 per cent of GNI and in absolute figures as well, Sweden is a significant global actor in the development assistance area.

A generous development assistance policy, an ambitious climate change agenda and long experience of consensus politics make Sweden an important actor that many countries listen to in negotiations. The Swedish Government has three main priority areas.

Move from capital flight and tax evasion to investments in sustainable development

Tax revenues are the foundation of shared welfare and poverty reduction. Enormous sums that could have been invested in sustainable development currently disappear due to capital flight and tax evasion. Combating illicit capital flight and tax evasion is therefore a crucial issue for the conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa.

Sweden participates very actively in various forums and processes in which the common goal is to combat capital flight and tax evasion. We hope that important steps will be taken on this issue in Addis Ababa.

Steps towards a green economy

The starting point of the new sustainable development agenda is that poverty reduction is impossible without social, economic and environmental sustainability. In Addis Ababa, it will be essential to provide incentives for increased investments in sustainable energy and infrastructure, put a price on carbon dioxide and take steps towards phasing out harmful fossil fuel subsidies. Sweden is a leader, a country that must show that green growth really is possible. Through climate financing, development assistance adapted to environmental and climate considerations, and increased pressure on multilateral actors such as the World Bank and the United Nations, Sweden can contribute to enabling tangible steps towards a green economy at global level too.

Gender equality creates resources

Equality between women and men, and girls and boys, is an effective tool in creating increased sustainable growth. Sweden is making efforts to ensure that the countries of the world take decisive steps in Addis Ababa for a fair distribution of resources between women and men, and women's full participation in economic life. We can never accept the discrimination that is now widespread and the world cannot afford to have so many women prevented from contributing to economic development. Sweden will

contribute through its national experience of concrete gender equality efforts and a gender equality perspective running through all foreign policy activities, including development assistance.

The global community now faces a momentous choice. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said that we are the first generation that can eradicate poverty and the last that can prevent serious climate change. We have the chance to create a future in which no one will go hungry, gender equality has been achieved and we live within the planetary boundaries. The journey towards this future will not end before the 17 new goals have been achieved, but it begins in earnest today at the Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa.

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

We are taking a stand for women's rights

Published 01 June 2015 Updated 01 June 2015

The EU's voice on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights must be strengthened. "Ahead of today's meeting in Brussels, we have worked hard for the EU to be on the front line of the fight for gender equality", write ministers Margot Wallström, Isabella Lövin and Åsa Regnér in Swedish daily newspaper SvD.

Although the fight for gender equality is gaining ground globally, in many parts of the world we are seeing a growing resistance to women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This is why Sweden is working down to the wire to ensure that the new Council conclusions on gender equality to be adopted today take a clear stance. The EU ministers gathering in Brussels this afternoon have the opportunity to put their differences behind them and stand up for the fundamental right of all individuals to have control over their own bodies – at a time when a strong EU voice is needed more than ever.

In the vicinity of the EU, violent fundamentalist groups are emerging that want to deprive women of the opportunity to participate in political life, achieve economic empowerment and gain access to health care. The desire to control women's bodies is expressed in its most extreme forms in fundamentalist groups such as ISIL, which uses sexual abuse to instil fear and gain ground. But it is not just on the battlegrounds that the fight for women's rights is being fought. Resistance to and questioning of the rights of women and LGBTQ people are also seen in international negotiation rooms

and among conservative forces making headway in Europe. A study by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and the magazine *Expo* shows how right-wing extremist and nationalist parties that are on the rise in the EU see the rights of women and LGBTQ people as a threat to the nation state and thus to their vision of society.

We are living in a time of great change in which women's economic and political influence is being strengthened and there is a growing consensus in the international community in favour of gender equality. Current resistance can be seen as a reaction to the successes achieved and proof that the fight for women's and LGBTQ people's rights must be relentless. The most controversial issue is also the most fundamental one – the right to exercise control over one's own body, sexuality and reproduction. Women's rights activists say that they can go and vote, but they cannot decide who to marry, who to have sex with or when to have children. This oppression restricts women's and girls' lives and opportunities to fully participate in society on the same terms as men.

In Sweden, we know that measures for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights pay off. A century ago, more women died during pregnancy and childbirth in Sweden than in Namibia today. Today, maternal mortality in Sweden is among the lowest in the world. Forty years ago, Swedish women gained the right to free, legal and safe abortions. Over the last 30 years in Sweden, no woman has died from the complications of an abortion. These are successes that have helped to build the Swedish welfare society that we all benefit from today. This year, 2015, is a year of unique opportunities to move forward on gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The ground-breaking UN Conference on Women in Beijing celebrates its 20th anniversary, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security celebrates its 15th anniversary, and the world is set to agree on new development goals to ensure sustainable development and eradicate poverty and injustice. The EU plays an important role in this work.

While there is a great deal of support for gender equality in the EU, opinions on the SRHR issue are divided. Unfortunately, a small number of countries have so far blocked a strong and united position, which has weakened the EU's voice on these issues in the world.

Ahead of today's meeting, the Government has been working hard with likeminded countries in the EU to bring about a change. During the six

months we have been in government we have managed to push through changes. At our initiative, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, recently announced that she plans to appoint a high-level representative for 1325 issues, in accordance with Sweden's proposal. This will strengthen the EU's work to combat sexual violence in conflict and to promote women's participation in peace-building efforts.

We are hopeful that our hard work will bear fruit today as well. Our feminist foreign policy is yielding results. By joining forces we will continue to push for the EU to be at the forefront of the fight for human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. This requires clear leadership at all levels in the EU, strengthened accountability and greater knowledge about gender equality. Cooperation with civil society must be deepened and the action plan for the EU's international gender equality work that is currently being drawn up must cover all areas of EU external action, which is not the case today. Sweden has an important voice internationally, but if we can get the entire EU on board we will increase the impact of a feminist policy that fundamentally challenges oppression, injustice and violence.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

We will fight in the EU for women's rights

Published 27 May 2015 Updated 27 May 2015

First published in Svenska Dagbladet 26 May 2015

Although the fight for gender equality is gaining ground globally, in many parts of the world we are seeing a growing resistance to women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This is why Sweden is working down to the wire to ensure that the new Council conclusions on gender equality to be adopted today take a clear stance. The EU ministers gathering in Brussels this afternoon have the opportunity to put their differences behind them and stand up for the fundamental right of all individuals to have control over their own bodies – at a time when a strong EU voice is needed more than ever.

In the vicinity of the EU, violent fundamentalist groups are emerging that want to deprive women of the opportunity to participate in political life, achieve economic empowerment and gain access to health care. The desire to control women's bodies is expressed in its most extreme forms in fundamentalist groups such as ISIL, which uses sexual abuse to instil fear and gain ground. But it is not just on the battlegrounds that the fight for women's rights is being fought. Resistance to and questioning of the rights of women and LGBTQ people are also seen in international negotiation rooms and among conservative forces making headway in Europe. A study by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and the magazine *Expo* shows how right-wing extremist and nationalist parties that are on the rise in the EU see the rights of women and LGBTQ people as a threat to the nation state and thus to their vision of society.

We are living in a time of great change in which women's economic and political influence is being strengthened and there is a growing consensus in

the international community in favour of gender equality. Current resistance can be seen as a reaction to the successes achieved and proof that the fight for women's and LGBTQ people's rights must be relentless.

The most controversial issue is also the most fundamental one – the right to exercise control over one's own body, sexuality and reproduction. Women's rights activists say that they can go and vote, but they cannot decide who to marry, who to have sex with or when to have children. This oppression restricts women's and girls' lives and opportunities to fully participate in society on the same terms as men. In Sweden, we know that measures for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights pay off. A century ago, more women died during pregnancy and childbirth in Sweden than in Namibia today. Today, maternal mortality in Sweden is among the lowest in the world. Forty years ago, Swedish women gained the right to free, legal and safe abortions. Over the last 30 years in Sweden, no woman has died from the complications of an abortion. These are successes that have helped to build the Swedish welfare society that we all benefit from today.

This year, 2015, is a year of unique opportunities to move forward on gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. The groundbreaking UN Conference on Women in Beijing celebrates its 20th anniversary, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security celebrates its 15th anniversary, and the world is set to agree on new development goals to ensure sustainable development and eradicate poverty and injustice. The EU plays an important role in this work.

While there is a great deal of support for gender equality in the EU, opinions on the SRHR issue are divided. Unfortunately, a small number of countries have so far blocked a strong and united position, which has weakened the EU's voice on these issues in the world. Ahead of today's meeting, the Government has been working hard with likeminded countries in the EU to bring about a change. During the six months we have been in government we have managed to push through changes. At our initiative, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, recently announced that she plans to appoint a high-level representative for 1325 issues, in accordance with Sweden's proposal. This will strengthen the EU's work to combat sexual violence in conflict and to promote women's participation in peace-building efforts.

We are hopeful that our hard work will bear fruit today as well. Our feminist foreign policy is yielding results. By joining forces we will continue to push

for the EU to be at the forefront of the fight for human rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. This requires clear leadership at all levels in the EU, strengthened accountability and greater knowledge about gender equality. Cooperation with civil society must be deepened and the action plan for the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development that is currently being drawn up must cover all areas of EU external action, which is not the case today.

Sweden has an important voice internationally, but if we can get the entire EU on board we will increase the impact of a feminist policy that fundamentally challenges oppression, injustice and violence.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation

Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Strengthening the sexual and reproductive health in Africa

Published 06 April 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Today is international World Health Day and we have much to celebrate. More and more people around the world are enjoying better health and living longer, child mortality is decreasing as is the number of people who become infected with HIV.

Fewer people are dying of malaria and maternal mortality has been halved since 1990. Swedish people contribute to this development via Swedish health aid, which last year amounted to SEK 4 billion. The Government is now allocating funds for groups that have fallen behind.

We are doing so because despite the progress that has been made, the needs and challenges remain considerable. Women are particularly vulnerable and Africa is further from the global targets on reducing maternal and infant mortality than other parts of the world. The Government will therefore shortly adopt a new strategy that better meets the sexual and reproductive health and rights challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa.

In sub-Saharan Africa, more than 400 women die every day as a result of complications in childbirth, and children here under the age of 5 also face the greatest risk of dying. At the same time, this is where the HIV epidemic is most widespread and three times as many young women as men are affected.

Lack of gender and LGBTQ rights

The lack of gender equality and men's sexual violence against women are among the causes of the problems. This explains the high number of teenage

pregnancies and the spread of HIV among young girls. Female genital mutilation also causes serious health problems and complications during childbirth. During my trip to Liberia and Sierra Leone, I was shocked at the widespread violence and the scope of genital mutilation. Almost 90 per cent of women in Sierra Leone have been genitally mutilated, and close to 70 per cent in Liberia. The most vulnerable are poor girls and women.

Unfortunately, we are also seeing that the progress made in recent years concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) has slowed down, and is even moving in the wrong direction. We are concerned by developments to do with the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons (LGBTQ) in Africa.

Homosexuality remains illegal in many African countries and homosexual people face harassment and discrimination on a daily basis. This affects their access to health and medical care. Increased international focus on these issues is positive, but at the same time creates increasingly entrenched backlashes that must be confronted.

Strengthening the health of women and girls

Ultimately, sexual and reproductive health and rights are about gender equality and the right to decide over one's own body. They are about the right to choose a partner and choose safe sex. About the right for women and girls to have access to legal and safe abortions. The lack of SRHR not only hampers poverty reduction, it is also a question of democracy. If you cannot decide over your own body, how can you then take part in society on equal terms?

Sweden has a long history of cooperation with African countries and great credibility in gender equality work. For many years, Sweden has contributed to strengthening the health of women and girls. We are now enhancing this work by means of a new strategy that includes funding of SEK 350 million annually that will:

- put greater focus on children and young people so that they learn about how the body works, about safe sex and contraceptives and also about their human rights. Focusing on views of masculinity is also important, since these views contribute to the problem;
- prioritise access to safe and legal abortions, and access to SRHR for LGBTQ people;

- focus on preventing child marriage and female genital mutilation; and
- strengthen national health systems – which is absolutely essential if health services are to be available to everyone – including by increasing use of reliable statistics so that decision-makers are better able to ensure that health care is fair and reaches the most vulnerable people.

It is not just in Africa that there is resistance to women, girls and LGBTQ people being allowed to decide over their own sexuality and exercise their human rights. This issue is politically sensitive and meets resistance from a variety of sources, in the EU as well as the UN. Sweden therefore has an important task in actively pursuing these issues. It is a task that the Government takes with the utmost seriousness.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden increases humanitarian aid to Syria

Published 30 March 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

SVD 30 mars 2015 Tomorrow, the international community will come together in Kuwait for a donor conference concerning the Syrian crisis. Sweden will be there to show our strong commitment and continued support to the region and all those affected by the horrors of war.

Our message during the conference will be clear. We must not abandon people who are entirely dependent on the rest of the world for their survival. This is why we will make a pledge for increased support.

There is a fear that the donor community will tire after four years and that the spotlight will be directed elsewhere. That the endless violence and the lack of a political solution will lead to resignation among the donors. But the world must not give up. The Syrian crisis is one of the most serious crises of our time. More than 220 000 people have been killed and 12 million people – half of the country’s population – have been forced to flee, often more than once; and of these, eight million are refugees in their own country. They are trapped in the terror of violence between various armed groups that are deliberately directing their attacks against civilian targets. Not least the barrel bombings of the Assad regime cause immense damage and injury in civilian areas.

Women and children worst affected by the war

As always, women and children are the worst affected by the war. This has been aggravated by the advance of ISIL. The extreme control and the terrible abuses being committed by ISIL are a cause for concern not just in

terms of security today, but also in terms of what the future may bring. All the while, we are hearing reports of how regime soldiers use rape as a military means of instilling fear into and repressing local communities. The abuses are continuing in the refugee camps outside the country's borders, where desperation and poverty are growing and humanitarian organisations report that increasing numbers of girls are being forced into marriages. And yet in the midst of this chaos, it is the women who are trying to bring normality back to everyday life, get food on the table and a roof over their heads, and care for the children and the elderly.

A real concern is the situation of children. We are witnessing a lost generation grow up before our eyes, and we must join forces to combat this. Over two million children in Syria are not attending school, and the same applies to over half of the child refugees outside the country – 600 000 children and rising. They are the future of Syria, and the growing hopelessness among child refugees risks turning into a powder keg with security implications for Sweden, too.

SEK 350 million in humanitarian support for Syria 2015

The difficulties of working inside Syria for help organisations and the protracted nature of the conflict must not deter donors. Sweden is therefore increasing its commitment in the Syrian crisis in a number of ways:

Sweden is stepping up its humanitarian operation. Because the situation is getting worse and the conflict is spreading further into the neighbouring countries, Sweden will pledge at the conference tomorrow SEK 350 million in humanitarian support for 2015 to alleviate the Syrian crisis. This is an increase on last year's initial pledge of SEK 270 million to Syria and the affected neighbouring countries. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency are following developments closely and if the situation deteriorates further there may be a need for more support. Special measures will be taken to protect women and girls from forced marriages, kidnapping and sexual violence.

Syria's neighbouring countries – Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, for example – are taking in by far the largest proportion of refugees from Syria. Three million people have so far sought refuge there. The EU must do more to support them. Sweden, together with Germany, has taken in the absolute majority of Syrian asylum seekers in the EU. Sweden has taken in some 65

000 people, including stateless people, since the war started in 2011. This can be compared with the approximately 220 000 in the EU as a whole, a figure that includes those taken in by Sweden.

New aid strategy for Syria

Sweden pushed for the adoption of the UN Security Council resolutions on improving access for humanitarian personnel, and we are now taking forceful action to ensure that these are respected. Sweden is one of the largest donors in the Syrian crisis and has a strong voice in the UN bodies. We are working systematically with the UN on the ground to find ways for help to reach vulnerable groups inside Syria. This has its problems, but many people are receiving help. Since 2011, Sweden has provided SEK 1.3 billion for everything from blankets and food to medical care and women's centres.

Sweden is adopting a new aid strategy for the Syrian crisis comprising SEK 1.5 billion over the coming years. The conflict in Syria continues to deteriorate and we therefore need a long-term and flexible strategy for how Sweden can best contribute to alleviating the suffering caused by the war, and how we can support democratic forces and mitigate the impact on neighbouring countries. It should bridge the unnecessary gap that currently exists between urgent disaster relief and long-term development work. This is about creating the conditions for a future Syria after the war, where peace can gain a foothold. Priorities will be children's schooling and support to civil society organisations that are working inside and outside the country under very difficult conditions to build confidence between people. These peaceful counterforces – often women's organisations – need the support and recognition of the rest of the world. This is crucial if there is to be a civil society that can build democracy once we have achieved peace.

Aid will not end the war or people's suffering. This will require a political solution. However, the lack of a political solution makes aid important. Used correctly, it can save lives and create better conditions for rebuilding the country. It will be a lifeline for very many people, make life that little more tolerable and give people the sense that others around the world are on their side.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden producing new strategy for Syrian crisis

Published 03 February 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Dagens Nyheter 3 februari 2015 Today, there are almost 50 million displaced people in the world. This is the highest number since the Second World War. They are fleeing from oppression, war and terrorism.

There are many trouble spots around the world, but the current situation in Syria and Iraq looks increasingly like the worst humanitarian disaster of our time. The civil war and the ISIL reign of terror have so far claimed 200 000 human lives. There are more than 10 million displaced Syrians, almost half of the country's population. Seven million remain in the country, but more than three million have managed to leave. Most are in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon.

Around six per cent, or 200 000, of the Syrian refugees have come to Europe. Around 60 000 people have sought asylum in Sweden.

When we meet United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres on Tuesday, our main messages will be that the world must come together to find a solution to the conflict and help the people fleeing from it. This is a human duty. We vow that Sweden will continue to take constructive action in this respect through our foreign policy, aid policy and migration policy. The work of the High Commissioner for Refugees deserves every support.

Only a political solution can end the conflict. The new Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura has our wholehearted support. He has taken a more localised approach and wants to de-escalate the violence levels and 'freeze' the conflict, starting in Aleppo. In addition, the efforts of the international community to cut off support to terrorism continue, for example by

preventing the financing of terrorism and stopping people from travelling as foreign terrorist fighters.

At the same time, ISIL ravages must be stopped so that people are not forced to flee. The flow of weapons, personnel and money to the terrorist sect must be cut off. Those travelling from other countries, such as Sweden, to fight for ISIL must be stopped. Obviously, the conflict and the war are the root problem and the cause of people being forced to flee.

The world has a clear humanitarian responsibility to help the people affected. It is chiefly Syria's neighbours who are now taking that responsibility. Sweden is providing considerable support to alleviate the suffering of people in and outside Syria who are affected by the hell of war. Since the conflict started in 2011, Sweden has contributed more than SEK 1.5 billion. We are now also one of the largest donors to both the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

Unfortunately, a political solution in Syria seems remote and the prospects of refugee repatriation are currently small. Hundreds of thousands of children in the region are growing up in camps where most cannot attend school. Families are living under extreme financial pressure and humanitarian conditions with little means of support. The frustration and vulnerability is hitting women and children hard. A generation risks being lost and the seeds of future problems are being sown.

The situation is exerting severe pressure on the neighbouring countries. Lebanon alone, which is the same size as Skåne, has taken in more than one million refugees. This creates unease and instability. It is evident that the humanitarian operations are inadequate. They must be linked to long-term support – to neighbouring countries, too. This is something the UNHCR has persistently pointed out to the leaders of the international community. Sweden supports the UNHCR appeal and the Government is now producing a new strategy for the Syrian crisis that covers both the urgent needs and the long-term measures to create better living conditions and support to public services in the neighbouring countries.

For decades, Sweden has offered protection to many people fleeing war and oppression. We have a tradition of solidarity that we should be proud of. We are still keeping up this tradition as 30 000 Syrians sought asylum in Sweden in 2014.

Sweden also works closely with the UNHCR on resettlement of quota

refugees directly from refugee camps, in for example Jordan and Lebanon, to western countries. Resettlement provides protection to individuals and also relieves the pressure on the neighbouring countries receiving large numbers of refugees. Sweden, via the Swedish Migration Board, very successfully led this work in 2014. More than 50 000 Syrians were offered a place of refuge in one of the 24 countries participating in the initiative.

This was positive, but more countries need to take responsibility for the reception of refugees. The Government is therefore working actively to encourage all EU Member States to participate in the resettlement initiative. In the EU, we are also pushing for more countries to receive refugees in a humane and legally secure manner. We welcome Mr Guterres's new proposals that all UN Member States should collectively fund part of the important work of the UNHCR through compulsory contributions.

There is no simple solution to the catastrophic situation of the world's refugees or to the bloody conflict in Syria. In order to really make a difference, taking responsibility is required within all of our respective areas of responsibility. Sweden will continue to be a close and strong partner of the UNHCR in its important work for the world's refugees. Our country will actively stand up for those people who are subjected to war and oppression, wherever they are.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs
Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development Cooperation
Morgan Johansson, Minister for Justice and Migration



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

"As a generous aid donor and role model, Sweden is a voice the world listens to"

Published 05 January 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Sydsvenskan 5 januari 2015 In 2015, the world has no less than three opportunities to put humanity on the right track for the future. Within a six-month period, three major international conferences will be held that will affect development for decades to come.

In Paris, a new climate agreement will be signed. In New York, the new global development goals to follow the Millennium Development Goals will be drawn up, and in Addis Ababa, the first serious discussions will be held on ways to direct financial flows so that they are used for the general good.

These decisions will set the agenda for the foreseeable future and affect our lives and the lives of our children and grandchildren.

In his report on the new global sustainability objectives, *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon states that the alignment of the stars has never been so favourable. The opportunity for mankind to embark upon a path towards dignity – to put an end to poverty, transform all our lives and protect the planet – will not return in our lifetime.

These are grand words, but hardly exaggerated.

Even so, very few people are aware of these ongoing processes – which can provide the world with the opportunity for a new start.

In the same way, very few people are aware of the role Sweden plays in

forming the new development agenda, which will not only apply to developing countries, but to all countries on the planet – both rich and poor.

Fifteen years ago, world leaders agreed on eight Millennium Development Goals to halve poverty and improve people's living conditions. The MDGs, which expire this year, show the success that can be achieved when the world works together.

The MDGs have contributed to lifting millions of people out of poverty, more children than ever before starting school, increasing life expectancy in practically the entire world, more countries holding democratic elections, and increasing the influence and power of women.

But we still face enormous challenges.

A glance at the past shows that 2014 was a dramatic year, with wider gaps and more people fleeing than at any time since the Second World War. At the same time global warming is continuing, threatening all the progress that has been made.

I think it safe to say that we will never be able to combat poverty around the world if we do not succeed in curbing climate change. To meet these challenges, the world must act now.

Sweden has a long tradition of promoting human rights issues and conflict and disaster prevention measures. Sweden is one of the world's largest aid donors and does not shrink from controversial issues. This has given us weight and credibility.

It also gives Sweden muscles, which it intends to make full use of to influence the important international agreements that will be entered into in 2015.

In the new development agenda, which will be adopted in September, Sweden will promote distinct goals – even as regards issues that meet with resistance, and with which many countries still have problems.

This involves strengthening democratic institutions, transparency and the rule of law, and promoting freedom from violence, gender equality and access to sexual and reproductive health.

All this, as well as respect for human rights, is essential to eradicating poverty.

At the same time, we find ourselves in a new and more serious situation where major parts of the earth's life-sustaining ecosystems are threatened. This requires switching to a new development model that does not exceed the planetary boundaries.

A summit will also be held in July on funding for the global development agenda.

International development cooperation is important, but on its own it can never create the conditions for the necessary change. Here, creative solutions are needed.

In 2003, Sweden was the first country in the world with a policy for global development, i.e. a plan for how all policy areas – not just development cooperation – are to promote equitable and sustainable global development.

For the whole world to meet the new sustainability objectives, all trade, investments in institutional capital, environmental, climate, tax and industrial policies must to a great degree be designed with this in mind.

Sweden must be proactive in this discussion and accordingly, one of the Government's priorities is to curb capital flight and tax avoidance in the developing countries.

In December, the new international climate agreement will be adopted in Paris.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that emissions of greenhouse gases must be reduced to zero during this century in order to avoid extreme weather with disastrous consequences.

This is a staggering challenge.

For this reason, an important part of aid and development cooperation lies in vigorously supporting investments in renewable energy and phasing out fossil fuels.

The developing countries will be hardest hit by climate change and one of the greatest stumbling blocks in the negotiations is how to finance transition and adaptation in these countries.

The UN Green Climate Fund is therefore crucial to achieving a good agreement in December. The generous contribution Sweden recently announced of SEK 4 billion to the Fund has received a great deal of

international attention and appreciation, and has also inspired several other countries to increase, or pledge new, contributions.

Sweden has an important role to play in the global arena during the coming year. As a generous aid donor and role model – a country that has shown that economic development linked to a strong welfare state is possible – Sweden is a voice the world listens to.

This is something to be proud of, but unfortunately also something often forgotten due to domestic bickering between the political blocs.

I therefore wish to point out that 2015 is the year in which we have the opportunity to contribute to a more sustainable and equitable world. If we act together, the opportunity really does exist.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Gender equality against HIV

Published 08 December 2014 Updated 17 May 2015

Upsala Nya Tidning 8 december 2014 While Ebola captures the worlds' attention the struggle against HIV and AIDS continues. Every 15 seconds a person is newly infected with HIV and every day more than 4000 people die in AIDS-related illnesses.

Globally the number of people living with HIV is three times the entire population of Sweden. This is a human tragedy that is allowed to continue despite the fact that we know how to stop the spread of HIV, and despite effective treatment being available. Now we must take vigorous action to close the gap between those who receive information, support and treatment, and those who are left behind - without access to knowledge, health care, or the power to decide over their own bodies.

A glance in the rearview mirror shows what is possible when the world joins forces. Thanks to the support and resources that countries have put in place for the AIDS response nearly 14 million people living with HIV today have access to treatment - a dramatic increase from 400 000 people in 2003. Globally, the number of new HIV infections has fallen by 38 percent since 2001.

As a result of improved methods to avoid HIV transmission from mother to child during pregnancy and child birth, over two hundred thousand children have been prevented from becoming infected each year.

But we need to do more. In southern Africa, AIDS is now the number one contributor to adolescent mortality and in several countries the number of girls and young women living with HIV is several times higher than the number of boys. A new generation risks being robbed of their future, with implications for the entire society. We know that lacking gender equality and

men's sexual violence against women increase the spread of HIV. These unequal power relationships are perhaps never as evident as when men assume control over women's bodies, and the power to decide when and where to have sex. Women's limited ability to say no or to negotiate condom use to protect themselves against HIV is compromised by their economically and socially vulnerable situation.

In many places, it is not uncommon for young girls to see it as their only option to engage in transactional sex with older boys and men, and sometimes even their teachers, in exchange for services: to get grades, school books, a new sweater or prepaid cards for their mobile phones.

To stop the spread of HIV, we need to increase women's power and influence in society as well as in their own lives.

Here it's important to address the issue from different angles. Cash-transfers, similar to the Swedish child grant, may help keep girls and young women in school and empower them through education. In a study in Malawi where poor young women and girls received a small grant of between one and fifteen dollars per month, the results showed that more girls finished their education, teenage pregnancies and early marriages fell by 30 percent and the number of new HIV infections were reduced by as much as 64 percent. Around the world we are also seeing how young women are mobilising to challenge harmful norms and values that limit their lives. Their power shows that change is not only possible, but already underway.

In the future no one should have to be infected with HIV, no one should die of AIDS and no one should be discriminated against because of their HIV status.

Sweden and UNAIDS are determined to work together to achieve this vision of the "three zeros". For that to happen, every new generation needs access to sexual education and knowledge on how to protect themselves against HIV, other sexuality transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. Sweden and UNAIDS will work with governments, civil society and other key stakeholders to ensure that all people have access to care, support and treatment without the risk of being subjected to discrimination or violence.

At the same time, we must also break the notions of masculinity and femininity that restrict girls' and women's living spaces and block the AIDS response.

Sweden has a long tradition of working towards gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights – sensitive issues that many other countries shy away from and in some cases oppose. That is precisely why Sweden's commitment and voice is especially important in order to once and for all end the AIDS epidemic.

Isabella Lövin, Minister for International Development and Cooperation, Sweden

Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The Green Climate Fund is not a charity but an investment in our shared future

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The Guardian 18 november 2014 A world that does not manage to curb global warming is an insecure world. A series of recent reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes it abundantly clear.

If we do not succeed in staying below the target of keeping temperature rises below 2C over preindustrial levels, the consequences are likely to be far-reaching and disastrous. We will see a dramatic rise in sea levels, by up to a metre in this century alone, a greater frequency of violent storms, increased desertification, with hundreds of millions of people experiencing water scarcity, and radical changes in entire ecosystems. This will pose a serious threat to the livelihoods of large swathes of people, causing unprecedented refugee flows and, in the worst case, new conflicts and wars.

Recently, military strategists around the world have declared that uncontrolled climate change constitutes a global security threat. In February this year, US secretary of state John Kerry called climate change “perhaps the world’s most fearsome weapon of mass destruction”, and a threat to democracy and our entire way of life.

In May, 16 US generals, writing in a report entitled National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change, warned that climate change will pose at least as great a threat to national security as the Cold War or transnational terrorism. Economist Lord Nicholas Stern echoed this warning recently in The Guardian.

Many people regard the UN climate summit in Paris next year as the last chance for the world to unite on a climate agreement that will enable us to meet the 2C target.

Little time remains before then, but there are vital stops along the way for the international community to demonstrate its commitment to addressing global warming. One was the recent G20 meeting in Brisbane, another is the pledging conference in Berlin this week, which aims to mobilise resources for the UN's Green Climate Fund (GCF). The task of the GCF will be to support developing countries through measures to promote climate change adaptation and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The new red-green government in Sweden has promised \$580m (£370) to the GCF. This contribution, which covers the period 2015–2018, is the most ambitious contribution per capita of the countries that have so far announced their intention to support the GCF.

It is well known that in purely factual terms, climate change will have the greatest impact on countries that are already poor: countries around the equator and small impoverished Pacific islands that face the threat of disappearing completely or being laid waste by extreme drought or flooding. It is therefore imperative to show our solidarity with those who need economic support.

At the same time, no country in the world will be immune to the consequences of climate change, and no country today can act alone to protect itself from global disasters. Sweden today is being severely tested by the strains imposed by the instability of the world around us. We receive unprecedented flows of refugees from wars and disaster, some of which have likely been caused by climate change.

This summer Sweden suffered exceptionally violent natural disasters – the largest forest fire in our history, and floods and torrential rain that destroyed houses and knocked out infrastructure. Similar disasters have occurred in the Balkans and the UK this year, while extreme waves caused astonishment this summer on the coasts of Spain and Portugal.

The GCF is pivotal in furthering international momentum to tackle climate change - by strengthening mutual confidence among all the parties involved and catalysing new capital that can help the world switch to clean, renewable energy.

We should not forget that this fund will potentially create millions of new jobs and lead to development and prosperity. The recent New Climate Economy report indicates that \$45 trillion needs to be invested in new energy infrastructure over the next 15 years, regardless of whether the energy is clean or dirty. The difference is that we will achieve a sustainable society if we choose clean.

Tackling climate change does not mean we should abstain from prosperity and development. Quite the contrary.

The GCF is not a charity; it is an investment for our collective future, for a secure world where we can all enjoy the welfare that our unique living planet can actually give us.

The Swedish government hopes and expects that many more of the developed countries will put enough money into the new GCF this Thursday to allow it to send a real signal that the world is jointly taking its responsibility and that we believe that investments in clean and renewable energy are possible. We cannot continue on the same track any longer, when both scientists and military experts warn us so emphatically what will happen if we do so.

There is another way. Let us take it.

Isabella Lövin is Sweden's minister for international development cooperation



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Convention on the Rights of the Child to become law

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Svenska Dagbladet 20 oktober 2014 Children have rights – the right to life, play and learning. This means all children: regardless of whether your name is Maria or Mariam and whether you live in Borlänge or Bamako.

This November marks 25 years since the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. So far, 193 countries have undertaken to respect, protect and promote the rights of the child. Much has improved since the Convention was adopted. But unfortunately, huge challenges still remain.

Developments in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, South Sudan and Liberia are brutal reminders of how children's rights are violated on a daily basis. Minors are cynically used as child soldiers, children are subjected to violence and exploitation, and girls are prevented from attending school, forced into marriage and subjected to life-threatening pregnancies.

A few days ago, Anna Hägg-Sjöquist and Pia Stavås Meier from the children's charity Plan Sverige urged the Government to prioritise children's rights in foreign policy and international development cooperation.

Our new cooperation government will do so, with great force and determination. Sweden must be a leading global force for the rights of the child and for gender equality. In the Statement of Government Policy, we said that Sweden's voice must always be clear and unambiguous when human dignity is violated, and that we will pursue a feminist foreign policy. Poverty reduction, sexual and reproductive health and rights and the fight against discrimination will be given high priority in the years ahead.

The UN has an important role to play in this, and the new Government will

give higher priority to UN cooperation. We will actively pursue these issues in view of the new global development agenda due to be negotiated by the UN member states ahead of the UN Summit in September 2015.

Today, we are among the very largest financiers of the UN's global development work. Via the UN, Sweden has contributed to a reduction of almost fifty per cent in the number of children dying before the age of five, down from 12.6 million in 1990 to 6.6 million in 2012. Last year alone, UNICEF provided water to 24 million people and sanitation to 7 million people, and gave 13.1 million people the possibility to wash their hands. In 2013, 3.6 million children in humanitarian crisis situations gained access to education. UNICEF has also contributed to 123 countries making all forms of sexual violence towards girls and boys punishable offences, and enabling 7 300 children with links to armed forces or groups to return to their families and communities.

At the same time, as ardent supporters of the UN we will not be afraid to criticise it if necessary. Swedish taxpayers' money must be used efficiently, and the UN needs to be reformed in order to be able to tackle the challenges of the future.

Human rights – including the rights of the child – are a cornerstone of Swedish foreign policy. But we also want to set a good example for other countries. Being a leader means leading the way. For this reason we will now take the next step, and begin the work to make the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child law in Sweden.

Standing up for children's rights and working for greater social and gender equality in the world will be the hallmarks of the new Government's work. As the ministers responsible for foreign affairs, development cooperation and children, we will shoulder our share of the responsibility for ensuring that children are able to enjoy their incontrovertible right to be just that – children.