



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Internet freedom in decline – a threat to our democracy

Published 11 June 2019

The internet must not be a place where hate campaigns and disinformation take over the flow of information. We must have clear requirements for large corporations that dominate social media globally. It is in everyone's interest that we do not leave the responsibility for our public debate and meeting places to companies, write Carin Jämtin, Margot Wallström and Peter Eriksson.

Freedom on the internet has declined for the eighth year in a row. The ability of states to shut down the internet is increasing. Journalists, independent media and human rights defenders are being subjected to physical and digital attacks. Opportunities to openly debate without risking hatred and threats, repression and persecution are being limited. The spread of disinformation is increasing and having a major impact.

On May 16-17 the Stockholm Internet Forum took place, bringing together 500 people from around 100 countries on the invitation of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to discuss the internet's role and future challenges. The focus was the shrinking democratic space online and internet access. The need for an international dialogue about the internet has never been more urgent.

Serious trend

The fact is that we are in the midst of a negative trend with serious consequences: authoritarian states are using advanced tools to recruit new supporters, polarise opinion, undermine democratic debate, and attack and

silence opponents. Increasingly, automated information flows, increased data collection, disinformation campaigns as well as opportunities and challenges regarding artificial intelligence have gone from being peripheral issues to central issues for society.

This is happening in large parts of the world. The impact of the internet on democracy and society is being discussed across the world, from Bogota and Kigali to Hanoi. In all these places, the internet is of crucial importance to economic development and poverty reduction, and as more and more people become connected, the conditions for positive sustainable development improve. This is an aspect we cannot afford to overlook.

Place demands on social media giants

The disinformation campaigns we see – in some cases led by governments – risk threatening our democracy. The internet cannot be a place where hate campaigns and disinformation take over the flow of information. We must have clear requirements for large corporations that dominate social media globally. It is in our common interest that we do not leave the responsibility for our public debate and meeting places to companies. This is essentially a question of democracy, of the public debate.

The negative trend, with a shrinking democratic space online, is deeply worrying and serious. This must not continue and this is exactly why we need joint action on the future of digital development. Turning this trend requires political awareness and joint, international commitments on issues such as what the internet will be like and how it will be used in the future. Human rights must not be undermined; they must be strengthened through access to the internet. The solutions can only be found in discussions between all stakeholders – states, civil society and companies, as well as everyone who is dependent on the internet in their everyday lives and their work.

The internet can remain a positive force

The starting point for these discussions must be the incredibly important role the internet has played and continues to play in opening up closed societies, creating employment and hope for the future, enabling communication between people throughout the world and promoting knowledge flows and cooperation at a genuinely global level. Despite the problems we are seeing now, technological developments have essentially offered enormous

opportunities and changed our world for the better. We must not allow the digital threats to make us passive. We must act now to ensure that the internet remains a positive force for development and democracy, and to protect access to the internet.

Half of the world's population does not yet have access to the internet, and Sida is working to ensure that more and more people get connected. But what kind of internet they gain access to is up to us. Together with all other actors, who want to work for a free, open and secure internet, we must mobilise for joint solutions. Many of those actors met at the Stockholm Internet Forum. We are proud to live in a free country, which can offer an important meeting place to human rights activists and journalists, who are under threat, to engage in these important discussions.

Carin Jämtin

Director-General, Sida

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Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

A Swedish disarmament initiative

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Opinion piece by Margot Wallström, published in Aftonbladet on 11 June 2019.

The risk of nuclear war is greater and the threat more serious than for many years. This is why the Government is hosting a high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament today. This is the first meeting of its kind for many years, and a number of countries will be taking part at ministerial level. The fact that the meeting is being conducted at a high political level and with ministers from all over the world shows the level of interest and the need to discuss the disarmament issue in an increasingly unsafe world.

The threat of nuclear weapons is currently at its highest level since the end of the Cold War. The Government sees and is concerned by increasing tensions between countries with nuclear weapons and an increasingly aggressive rhetoric, as well as a building up of arsenals. We know that nuclear weapon use on one single occasion would have unthinkable humanitarian consequences that no country can handle.

We also see a lack of willingness to respect and maintain the disarmament agreements that for many years have underpinned international efforts for disarmament and non-proliferation. Examples of this include the increasing tensions between Russia and the United States, which have both left the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) following a Russian treaty breach. The uncertain future of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) further heightens the seriousness of the situation. If these international agreements are not upheld, the threat to Sweden's own security also increases.

One cornerstone of this work is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This is partly to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and partly to encourage nuclear-weapon states to reduce their

arsenals. A great deal hangs in the balance therefore when the NPT countries meet next year for a review of the Treaty's implementation. The Swedish Government wants to help ensure that this Review Conference achieves the results the world so badly needs, not least concerning disarmament. But the political will among the Treaty's members needs to be strengthened and preparations for this need to begin immediately.

It is against this background that the Government is making a concerted effort, and an important part of this work is today's high-level meeting. A wide range of countries have been invited to the meeting, all with different challenges and security policy conditions, but with a shared ambition to work for concrete results that bring us closer to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Today's meeting will be about measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapon use. Our goal is for the meeting to result in a declaration that makes clear our countries' plan for the period ahead, with the objective of ensuring a successful Review Conference next year.

The Government's objective is a world free of nuclear weapons. Sceptics will always claim that the time is not ripe for fresh progress, but cynicism has never been a political force to be reckoned with. Let us therefore never forget that most things seem impossible until they have been achieved, as was also the case in 1985 when superpower rivals the United States and Russia took the first step towards a joint plan for disarmament. The joint statement that was signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev contained the now familiar words: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." If this kind of progress was possible during the frostiest days of the Cold War, then it is possible today too.

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

"The EU Eastern Partnership has been a success"

Published 13 May 2019

Ten years ago, Sweden, together with Poland, initiated the EU's Eastern Partnership. As the partnership now enters its second decade, it is a good time to highlight three priorities for its future development, writes Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström.

The Eastern Partnership has been a success.

A claim like that is justified on its tenth anniversary because, frankly, the Eastern Partnership has transformed the six partner countries, their relation to the EU and the EU itself. It has brought more extensive change to the region than could have been foreseen ten years ago. In addition, it has created a common EU platform and policy towards its Eastern neighbourhood.

As the Eastern Partnership now enters its second decade, as one of its co-founders I want to highlight three priorities for its future:

1. The Eastern Partnership has always been built on shared values, and so may it continue.

The EU is underpinned by a firm belief in the universality of our indivisible human rights –civil and political, economic, social and cultural, in democracy and the rule of law, as well as a strong commitment to the European security order and every country's right to choose its own path. These are also central to the partnership between the EU and its Eastern neighbours.

Today, some of these values are under pressure globally, and the EU is no

exception. It is more important than ever to remind ourselves why, in our history, we fought so hard to gain them.

This means that we will keep pushing for reforms to fight corruption, to increase transparency and to foster social equality. Fighting corruption is not only about preventing the misuse of resources. It is also a matter of strengthening national security.

We will provide more support to civil society actors and professional independent media, and will not remain silent when democracy is eroded. Through such measures, we build resilience in a broader sense.

2. People should always be at the centre of Eastern Partnership policy.

Any political initiative that does not deliver concrete results for people's everyday lives will eventually lose its relevance. The Eastern Partnership must keep on delivering tangible change for the people of the partnership countries.

In this regard, the visa-free agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, and Erasmus+ education exchanges are more than just words. To many people, they are essential improvements and concrete symbols of the European future of their home countries.

We need stronger measures for gender equality and young people. Equality between women and men should be placed high on the agenda of all the partner countries. We must invest much more in young peoples' skills, education and vocational training, SME development and their opportunities to create a good future for themselves in their own countries. We need to further strengthen Erasmus+ and to increase links between schools in the EU and in the region.

3. We must accept that development will never be linear.

The six partner countries differ in their reform ambitions and in their perspectives on the EU. It is natural that the EU approach to these countries differs, too. As long as partner countries continue to reform, the EU should continue to support and offer deeper and more extensive cooperation.

Our support to reforms should continue to be based on merit. Such merit is measured by reform progress, political will and ownership – not by words alone. Those who deliver will receive more in return from the EU. Correspondingly, we will respond with less support for less progress when

called for.

Similarly, we must develop cooperation with all six Eastern Partnership countries. More can and must be done regionally in Europe – the EU and Eastern Partnership countries together. Such issues include climate change, disinformation, migration and human trafficking.

One final remark: the Eastern Partnership has changed the perspective of the EU. We no longer talk about our Eastern neighbours as post-Soviet states, but as European partners. We no longer define our relations with these countries by the past, but by a common future. This is in itself a great achievement, and the right approach for the years to come.

Margot Wallström

Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

We're taking up the fight against prostitution

Published 13 March 2019

Opinion piece in Svenska Dagbladet by foreign ministers Jean-Yves Le Drian and Margot Wallström. Published on 8 March 2019.

On International Women's Day, Sweden and France are initiating a diplomatic offensive against trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation. We have agreed to develop a strategy to combat trafficking in human beings and prostitution in Europe and globally.

Sweden conducts a feminist foreign policy; France has feminist diplomacy. Together, we want to be at the vanguard of the fight against trafficking in human beings. We hope that more countries will join this important work for human rights.

The link between prostitution and trafficking in human beings is well documented and researched. One figure is enough to illustrate the situation: in the major brothels in Western and Central Europe, an estimated 95 per cent of the women come from other regions and continents – often Eastern Europe and Africa.

Testimony from brothels in Western European countries where prostitution is legal is shocking. Statistics show that the risk of developing post-traumatic stress is higher in prostitution than in war.

There are forces arguing for the legalisation of prostitution. But regardless of whether it is legal or not, prostitution always means that vulnerable people are forced to live under inhumane conditions. That's why France and Sweden have a clear position of rejecting any notion of prostitution as a form of work. We do not accept, and will fight the use of, the term 'sex work'.

France and Sweden have, together with many other countries, adopted laws that make the purchase of sex, but not the sale, illegal. This legislation has been effective in reducing the demand for prostitution and makes it easier to help victims leave prostitution. In Sweden, where the legislation has been in force for 20 years, there are comparatively few prostitutes, and the prevalence of trafficking in human beings is relatively low.

The diplomatic offensive that we are initiating today will strengthen the fight against trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation. We will encourage more countries to adopt prostitution legislation like that in France and Sweden.

This will be supported by sharing knowledge about trafficking in human beings and prostitution, stimulating debate and discussion of the role of men and gender equality, supporting women's shelters and in other ways helping victims of trafficking in human beings to a better existence, as well as by promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights in all ways, including financially.

Our fight against trafficking in human beings will be conducted together with others. We will collaborate with civil society organisations, women's shelters and other actors to make policy as effective as possible.

No one dreams of becoming a prostitute. Victims of trafficking in human beings live under conditions that are truly horrible – in Europe in the 21st century! We cannot allow this to continue.

Jean-Yves Le Drian

France's Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs

Margot Wallström

Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right

Published 17 July 2018

Freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right. But despite this, people are persecuted, displaced and murdered because of their religion. Religious sites are destroyed and buildings set ablaze. We see this in the Middle East, where in recent years the situation of religious minorities has deteriorated.

During the Daesh advance, Christian groups in Iraq and Syria suffered unspeakable abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence, and many were killed. Other minorities were also targeted, such as the Yazidis, whose women were forced into sex slavery under Daesh. In Egypt, the Coptic Christian minority has again become the target of repeated terrorist attacks. Similar developments are taking place in Nigeria, Indonesia and Pakistan. In other places, religious freedom is severely restricted, as are other human rights. We also see ethnic and religious minorities fall victim closer to home. Synagogues and mosques are attacked and destroyed in towns and cities in Sweden, Christian refugees in Swedish refugee centres bear witness to serious threats and harassment, and terrorism in Europe is a threat to the pluralism and democracy that we have fought so hard to build.

Sweden condemns these abuses, acts of violence and killings. Everyone should be able to hold a religion without fear of threat. The Government is taking broad-based measures to prevent these threats to pluralism. I recently received the Presiding Committee of the Christian Council of Sweden to talk about global trends in freedom of religion or belief.

Promoting and protecting human rights is a cornerstone of Swedish foreign policy. Sweden is working actively – bilaterally with individual countries and in multilateral contexts – to strengthen respect for freedom of religion or belief. Engaging other governments in efforts to strengthen protection for

human rights is a permanent item on our agenda. Sweden's Ambassador for human rights, democracy and the rule of law has freedom of religion or belief among her areas of responsibility. Promoting this freedom is thus an ongoing part of her work. Sweden's Ambassador to the Holy See conducts a dialogue with the Vatican on the issue, and the Swedish Institute in Alexandria, which is part of the Swedish Foreign Service, works to promote interfaith dialogue. Our Ambassador to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation continuously raises freedom of religion, including the vulnerable situation of Christians in the Muslim world. It is important to review and report on developments, increase awareness, and hold perpetrators of abuse and of human rights violations to account.

Reinforcing civil society is an important step in strengthening human rights and the protection of religious minorities. This work also includes our extensive efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law around the world. As minorities are often victims of terrorism and violent extremism, greater international cooperation is needed to prevent violent extremism and strengthen counter-terrorism efforts. Sweden's participation in the Global Coalition against Daesh includes contributing military trainers to the Coalition's training mission. Sweden's international counter-terrorism priorities are aimed at long-term prevention of violent extremism in compliance with international human rights law. Security-oriented and punitive approaches alone risk being counterproductive. Excessive use of force by police and disproportionate security measures perceived as targeting particular groups fuel some of the grievances exploited by violent extremist propaganda. Strengthening democracy to counter violent extremism is a priority for the Government.

Development cooperation is an essential part of Sweden's efforts to strengthen human rights and prevent the violent extremism that often targets religious minorities. Sweden has bilateral development cooperation with Iraq, a regional strategy for the Syria crisis, and wider regional engagement in the Middle East and North Africa. Our support is based on a rights perspective, with a special focus on vulnerable groups, including ethnic and religious minorities. Contributions and projects range from strengthening democratic governance, peacebuilding and mechanisms for protecting human rights, to support to civil society, education and other basic social services.

We can naturally do more. Understanding the challenges of coexistence, the links between religion and politics in the world, and freedom of religion or belief is central; for this reason, we invest more in education. For example, the Swedish Mission Council has run a freedom of religion course at the

Ministry for Foreign Affairs. We organise and participate actively and regularly in conferences and seminars that address these issues, both at home and around the world. I have also taken steps for a conference during the next electoral period where concepts such as genocide will be discussed; the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide will be invited to take part. We are clarifying the title of our Ambassador to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and for intercultural and interfaith dialogue, who will receive a special assignment for the fight against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and the protection of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East and North Africa.

I am currently also setting up an internal working group at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to enhance coordination of our various actors who provide support to religious minorities in different ways.

Religion plays a major role in many conflict situations around the world. Finding ways to co-exist, even when religious beliefs differ, is therefore crucial for sustainable peace. Violence, harassment or persecution based on a person's religion must never be accepted or normalised. We will continue to fight for this during the next electoral period.

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

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

Published 13 July 2018

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



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Action needed to address nuclear threats

Published 05 July 2018 Updated 05 July 2018

Fifty years ago – in July 1968 – the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was opened for signature, following years of complex but ultimately successful negotiations. Shortly thereafter, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden signed the treaty. Our countries have been steadfast supporters of the NPT ever since.

Today a total of 191 states have joined the treaty and it must be considered a multilateral success story. For us, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation is an obvious priority – a policy choice underpinned by both humanitarian and security concerns, as well as by global and regional considerations.

Over the years, the treaty has proven its resilience. The global stockpile of nuclear weapons has been reduced from its Cold War peak of 70 000 warheads to some 14 500 today. The proliferation of nuclear weapons has been curtailed, and the benefits of civilian nuclear energy and technology have been shared on a global scale.

However, the current global security environment is impeding efforts to pursue the vision of a world without nuclear weapons and to close remaining nuclear proliferation loopholes. The North Korean nuclear and missiles programmes are flagrant violations of a series of UN Security Council resolutions and a serious challenge to the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. The outcome of the recent summit in Singapore was a step in right direction, but the real test lies in its implementation. Nuclear disarmament by the DPRK is the key factor.

The Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) is a key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture and is crucial for the security of the region. But it has now been brought into jeopardy. Moreover, the recent recurrent use of chemical weapons in Syria is challenging the international norms against the use of weapons of mass destruction. Failure to address the complex situation we are facing could seriously undermine the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime that the NPT embodies.

We all have a responsibility to work hard to find common ground. We must focus on what unites us, rather than on what divides us. The Nordic countries cooperate closely on disarmament and non-proliferation, despite our different forms of association with the EU and NATO. History has taught us that sustainable security can only be attained through cooperation. In our efforts to uphold and strengthen the NPT, this is a lesson well worth remembering.

On the 50th anniversary of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, our message is clear: We call for continued global commitment to the treaty and to international rules-based cooperation, and a willingness to rebuild mutual trust after years of polarisation. This requires a concerted effort and clear political engagement on the part of both nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states.

The two largest nuclear weapons states have a special responsibility. We strongly encourage the US and Russia to extend the New START treaty and to seek further reciprocal reductions in strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed warheads. We also call on the US and Russia to resolve the serious concerns about Russia's compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty through diplomatic measures. This treaty is of crucial importance for European security.

Looking towards the review of the NPT in 2020, we need to reaffirm, and make progress on, outstanding commitments made within the treaty's framework. A forward-looking agenda covering all three pillars of the treaty – disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy – is also needed.

Specific items on this agenda could include:

- Risk reduction: Measures to reduce the risk of accidental use of nuclear weapons, such as prior notification and reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons.

- Confidence-building measures: Enhanced transparency by the nuclear weapons states and strengthened negative security assurances to non-nuclear weapons states, ideally in a legally binding form.
- Practical steps: Developing credible multilateral solutions to verify future nuclear disarmament.
- Arms control: Addressing the issue of non-strategic nuclear weapons, a category of weapons currently not covered by any arms control treaty.
- Strengthening non-proliferation: Working towards universal acceptance of the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and its Additional Protocol as the global safeguards standard.
- Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT): Strengthening the global norm against nuclear testing by ensuring the entry into force of the CTBT.
- Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty: Negotiating and concluding an effectively verifiable treaty that bans the production of fissile material that could be used in nuclear weapons, and that also includes practical measures for scaling down existing stocks.
- Peaceful uses: Making the most of peaceful applications of nuclear technologies in efforts to achieve the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in areas such as health, food and water security, and environment surveillance.

For the past 50 years, the NPT has served the international community well. Yet for all its success, its future cannot be taken for granted. Above all, NPT members must uphold the common goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Everything possible must be done to avert the risk of nuclear war and, in the words of the treaty itself, 'the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind'. We, the Nordic countries, are certainly willing to do our share.

Anders Samuelsen
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark

Timo Soini
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

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Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

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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



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

International Community Must Unite to Save the Syrian Civilians

Published 20 February 2018

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Margot Wallström

After seven years of war, the violence and intolerable suffering inflicted on the civilian population in Syria continues without respite. In fact, we are now witnessing some of the worst fighting since the conflict began. In the past few weeks alone, hundreds more people have lost their lives and tens of thousands have been driven from their homes. There are persistent reports of attacks directed at hospitals and schools, revealing complete disregard for human life and the duty to protect civilians.

Time is running out for the people of Syria. Even before the most recent escalation, the humanitarian situation in Syria was one of the worst in the world. The conflict has driven 11 million people, half of the Syrian population, from their homes, time and again. Many have found refuge in the region and beyond. Inside Syria, 13 million people are dependent on humanitarian assistance to stay alive. The worst affected are the 2.5 million people trapped in towns and cities that are cut off from the rest of the country by military sieges. As a result of this cruel tactic, humanitarian access to these communities is now almost non-existent. They cannot survive much longer. The current escalation of violence will undoubtedly push many over the edge. Children and young people make up more than half of the displaced, as well as half of those in need of humanitarian assistance.

Against this background, and in response to calls from the United Nations

and its humanitarian agencies, Sweden and Kuwait have proposed a resolution in the UN Security Council. The draft resolution calls for an immediate pause in hostilities in Syria to enable regular aid convoys with food and medicines to all those in need, increased protection of civilians and the safe medical evacuation of the critically ill and wounded. Our message is clear: the international community can no longer stand idly by as this devastating human tragedy continues to escalate.

We must now show unity and put the lives of civilians first. The human toll of this conflict to date has been devastating and the unwillingness of the UN Security Council to act is putting its credibility at stake. However, the adoption of resolution 2393 in December 2017 shows that meaningful Council action to alleviate the suffering in Syria is possible. Resolution 2393 ensured the continuation of a vital humanitarian lifeline for three million Syrians in parts of the north and south of the country. It was the only resolution on Syria adopted within the Council last year. More must be done to address the needs of civilians right across the country.

Although the tireless efforts of the humanitarian community are important, the only way to end the humanitarian crisis in Syria is through a sustainable political solution to the conflict. We know that a sustainable peace is more likely to be achieved when women are adequately represented and actively participates in the decision-making. We remain convinced that the only viable path to a just peace in Syria is through the UN-led political process. The UN Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, have our full support in their efforts.

In the absence of a political solution, civilians will continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. They need us to act now to save lives. We trust that all members of the Security Council will put their differences aside, engage constructively and adopt a purely humanitarian resolution that can make a real difference for people who have suffered through seven years of conflict. Surely, we can do at least this.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Margot Wallström

(Originally published in Asharq Al-Awsat Newspaper)



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

We cannot stand idly by while journalists are murdered

Published 11 January 2018

Opinion piece by Margot Wallström in Aftonbladet on 8 January 2018.

Online hate and disinformation make the need for journalists greater than ever.

More than 800 journalists have been murdered in the past decade. Nine out of ten murders remain unsolved. This data comes from UNESCO, which recently launched its report on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development. The Government is now strengthening efforts to protect journalists' safety.

When the world becomes more and more insecure, when democracy is under pressure and human rights are questioned – it is then that we need journalists most. It is they who uphold free speech and hold those of us in power accountable. When they are threatened, we must do everything in our power to protect them.

We can never accept threats and hatred being directed at journalists for doing their job, or the fact that women journalists are often particularly subjected to threats and harassment just because they are women. We cannot stand idly by as organised online hate grows and is linked to disinformation campaigns.

Social debate is like air in the lungs of democracy. Democracy is best served when many voices and perspectives are heard.

Sweden has long had a strong voice on these issues. We have actively placed the issue of journalists' safety in focus in the UN, the EU, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. It was Sweden that initiated the pioneering resolution in

the UN Human Rights Council that confirmed that human rights, including freedom of expression, must be respected both offline and online.

Between 2014 and 2017, Sweden has quadrupled its financial support to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). During this period we have also been on UNESCO's Executive Board and have been a strong driving force for UNESCO to strengthen its work on freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

Sweden has therefore submitted several resolutions in UNESCO's Executive Board and General Conference urging all member states to strengthen their national efforts to protect journalists from violence and to counter impunity.

Last year, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs drew the attention of the world to the first free speech act in the world, the Swedish Freedom of the Press Act, which celebrated its 250th anniversary. At an international expert meeting in Stockholm, which I hosted, hate and threats against women journalists were discussed.

This year, we have also expanded our reports on human rights, in which freedom of expression and freedom of the press issues are central in all 135 countries that are analysed. All of these reports are published on the MFA website.

In the coming year, the Government's focus on freedom of expression and journalists' safety will intensify.

To follow up last year's expert seminar, I will invite national and international experts, journalists, civil society organisations and particularly engaged states for discussions.

The aim is to move from words to action and agree a number of voluntary commitments by the participating states.

The Institute for Further Education of Journalists and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs have been instructed to jointly implement a pilot study to see how a digital support centre for threatened women journalists could be arranged.

The Government also decided to support a course for journalists held by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Sanremo, Italy, in December. The course aims to strengthen their knowledge of the protection that international humanitarian law provides to the media.

Threats to journalists and writers are also a threat to democracy. We must never stand idly by while journalists are silenced. We must stand up against restrictions to freedom of expression regardless of where or how they are expressed.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden has strengthened the voice of women in the United Nations Security Council

Published 04 January 2018

Opinion piece by Margot Wallström, published in Dagens Nyheter on 2 January 2018

"After a year on the UN Security Council, we can confirm that Sweden has made its mark. Although 2018 will present major challenges, the Government has its sights set on results. –We will continue our efforts to ensure a more secure world and, consequently, a more secure Sweden," writes Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström.

Crises and security threats abound in our world. Fulfilling its mandate to maintain international peace and security has perhaps never been more difficult for the UN Security Council.

The United Nations and the Security Council are the bedrock of our rules-based world order, which is increasingly being challenged today by authoritarian leaders and states. Defending this order is of vital interest to Sweden – it is fundamental to our sovereignty and security.

After the Second World War, the world's countries agreed on common rules governing international relations and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The aim was to ensure that humanity would never again experience the horrors of war. Structures – such as the UN and its highest executive body, the Security Council – were necessary to ensure compliance with these rules. In this way, bloodshed on the battlefield could be replaced by patience at the negotiating table.

Maintaining this world order has been far from easy. During the UN's 70-

year existence, the world has witnessed countless conflicts and unimaginable human suffering. But a world without a rules-based system – based only on 'might is right' – would have been much less secure.

With this insight, we know that Sweden must continue to do everything it can to defend this rules-based world order. It is a prerequisite for our own security, and for peace and progress in the world.

Sweden is now halfway through its two-year term on the Security Council.

Since taking its seat in January 2017, Sweden has established itself as a credible and influential member. Achieving results requires sensitive and active diplomacy, combined with political courage. We stand up for our values, international law, human rights, gender equality and a humanitarian perspective, while also working hard to avoid political deadlocks.

Sweden has made a significant impact in five areas:

1. Sweden has strengthened the voice of women. The Security Council must move from words to action to ensure that women take part in peace processes, and to prevent women in conflict-affected countries from being subjected to violence. Studies show that peace agreements have a 35 per cent greater chance of lasting when women have a seat at the negotiating table.

Our work is producing results. Women were mentioned in every Security Council statement on emergency situations in 2017 – the corresponding figure in 2016 was 69 per cent. We have introduced stronger wording about women in resolutions, statements and peace operation mandates. We have also succeeded in getting the Security Council to take a clearer stance against sexual and gender-based violence, and sexual abuse, by personnel deployed by the UN.

2. Sweden has put the spotlight on prevention and the new challenges of our time. The Security Council needs to use broader concepts of security that include factors such as climate change and poverty. At Sweden's initiative, the Security Council agreed on a resolution on Lake Chad that, for the first time, clearly outlines the link between climate change and security. Thanks to Sweden's efforts, in August the Security Council was able for the first time to call attention to the link between famine and conflict.

The year's clearest example of conflict prevention was in January. As

President of the Security Council, Sweden played a leading role in the Council contributing to a peaceful transition in Gambia. Since armed conflict was avoided, one year on we have almost forgotten that it could easily have gone the other way.

3. Sweden has contributed to the Security Council taking action in the worst crises of our time. The situation in Yemen is one example. Sweden, following several requests for action, directed the Council's focus to the country's humanitarian situation, considered the gravest in the world today: the scene of unimaginable human suffering, with 22 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.

Myanmar, and the horrendous persecution of the Rohingya people, is another example. In November, after Sweden's urgent efforts, the Security Council for the first time unanimously condemned the violence and human rights violations. Steps have been taken in the right direction – and now the country's leaders must take responsibility for this crisis.

Thanks to the renewal of resolution 2165, millions of people in Syria can continue to receive humanitarian assistance, such as food, fuel, blankets and protective measures. Sweden, together with Egypt and Japan, led the procedure in the Council to renew the resolution's mandate. This was the only time the Council could agree on a resolution on Syria in 2017.

4. Sweden has worked inclusively – to ensure that peace and security concern everyone. We have made certain that those affected by the Security Council have a voice in the Security Council. During Sweden's Presidency, the foreign ministers of Mali and Somalia, and representatives of the African Union, briefed the Council.

In 2017, there was a pronounced increase in the number of civil society organisations that spoke in the Security Council, which Sweden worked actively to achieve. For instance, seven representatives spoke on the theme of women, peace and security during the year – in 2016, this happened only once. We also have regular meetings with civil society in Sweden. The work of the Security Council has also become more accessible through the active use of social media.

5. We have protected Sweden's security through our work on the Security Council. An effective world order, with the Charter of the United Nations at its core, is essential to our freedom and self-determination. As a member of the Security Council, we have a unique opportunity to defend international

law and ensure any violation results in consequences. This is also how we protect our neighbourhood and the foundations of the European Union.

After a year on the Security Council, we can confirm that our work is producing results. We know, however, that many crises will continue, and that divisions in the Council will persist. We cannot ignore the fact that the right to veto was used six times in 2017. Unfortunately, unlike New Year's bells, we cannot 'ring out the old'.

This year, 2018, will present many challenges: the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East, the increasingly pronounced effects of climate change – the list could go on. But we will tackle each one. We embark on this new year with determination and with our sights set on results.

As our world becomes less secure, isolating ourselves and withdrawing from the international arena is not the way to go. The Government will continue its international efforts to achieve a more secure world – through more, not less, cooperation. This will also make Sweden more secure. We will continue our fight for sustainable peace and security in a turbulent age.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

"EU's eastern partnership needs revival"

Published 14 November 2017

Opinion piece, published in EUobserver, by Margot Wallström and Witold Waszczykowski, Sweden's and Poland's foreign affairs ministers. Stockholm and Warsaw, 14 November 2017.

Eight years ago, the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) was launched. It was jointly initiated by Poland and Sweden, and meant that the EU deepened its relations with six of its closest neighbours, the home of 75 million people: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The EaP has been one of the most successful foreign policy initiatives of the EU. For instance, since 2009, the European Union provided €1.5 billion for the development of companies across the region.

Last year, more than 4,000 students from the region received scholarships in the EU, and almost 10,000 young people took part in exchange programmes. Citizens of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine now travel without a visa to Schengen countries.

A majority of people in the region (61 percent) believe that developing stronger relations with the EU is a good thing. More than 70 percent of people in the region view the EU as a bearer of core values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law, civil liberties and economic prosperity, peace, stability and security.

Summit in Brussels

Despite past successes, the EaP needs a revival to remain relevant in the

future.

On 24 November, European leaders will meet for the EaP summit in Brussels. We now want to propose a way ahead for the development of the EaP. It needs to be more focused on the needs of people, in particular young people, and produce more concrete results in the four following areas:

Ownership. We believe that all countries that are engaged in the EaP policies should be mutually responsible for carrying out its goals and priorities. Those who declare higher ambitions should also deliver on the reforms they have committed to.

Georgia is a good example.

Resilience. The policy dialogue between the EU and the Partner countries should focus on things that make our societies stronger. This means strengthening democratic institutions, supporting human rights and fundamental freedoms, fighting corruption, increasing transparency, making bureaucracy more efficient and increasing equality between men and women.

It also means focusing on environmental issues and meeting the challenges posed by climate change.

Public engagement. There is a link between building more resilient societies and the level of trust people have in institutions; one cannot be achieved without the other.

The EaP must make sense to people, and we must make sure that any reforms can be felt by ordinary people.

Young people are particularly important here, and we have asked the European Commission for a youth package to be prepared for the Summit.

Connectivity. We should give priority to all measures that bring people closer together. These could include visa-free travel, exchange programmes, roads, railroads, broadband internet and lower roaming tariffs.

The EU has already decided to extend its connection grids to EaP countries.

This will not only be beneficial for trade, but also for building stronger ties between people in our countries. Since infrastructure is costly, we need to combine grants and loans from European and other international financial institutions.

Stability and resilience

While the EaP does not deal with hard security, it can be instrumental in building stability and resilience. It can also be a platform for cooperation among regional partners.

Next year, both Poland and Sweden will be represented at the UN Security Council as non-permanent members. We want to use this opportunity to promote conflict resolution and crisis management, especially in the EaP region.

Poland and Sweden remain committed to the EaP. And, as Sweden and Poland have always emphasised, the door should be kept open to potential membership for those countries that truly transform.

We take responsibility for this relationship and are convinced that building stronger relations between the EU and its Eastern Partners will lead to better lives for the people in our countries.

Margot Wallström and Witold Waszczykowski



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Wallström: A nuclear-weapon-free world is achievable

Published 29 August 2017

A treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons was adopted at the UN General Assembly in July this year. The Government will now conduct a thorough impact assessment with a view to signing the treaty, says Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström.

Nuclear weapons are the single greatest threat to humanity and their continued existence must be seen as an international failure. Today's nuclear weapons are many times more powerful than the atomic bombs that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki 72 years ago, and could destroy cities with millions of inhabitants. Such an attack could also trigger a chain reaction that could lead to a nuclear war with immense humanitarian consequences. This is why it was important for the Government to vote in favour of the treaty negotiated at the United Nations General Assembly in July. History has shown that there is no other path to take.

With this treaty, 122 UN Member States are now prepared to support and strengthen international norms against the use and possession of nuclear weapons. This prohibition makes nuclear weapons the last weapons of mass destruction to be banned; biological and chemical weapons were banned by international conventions in 1975 and 1993 respectively.

Ever since the destructive capacity of nuclear weapons became clear, extensive diplomatic efforts have been made to have them abolished and to promote disarmament. Thanks to enormous efforts, the Cold War nuclear arsenals that reached a record-high of around 70 000 nuclear weapons have been reduced to today's approximately 15 000. South Africa, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus also completely eliminated their nuclear weapons

arsenals during that time. This is a great success, and shows that disarmament is possible. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the NPT and often regarded as the cornerstone of international disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, has been of fundamental importance here. Two key pillars of the NPT are to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons to additional states than the five that already possessed nuclear weapons when the NPT entered into force – the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, China and France – and to ensure that these five states reduce their arsenals.

However, a historical review of the NPT should also note the failures that have led to the emergence of new nuclear-weapon states. Unfortunately, we also see that many of the original nuclear-weapon states are now modernising their arsenals in contravention of the NPT's fundamental and long-term objective of disarmament.

It is against this background that support for a total ban on nuclear weapons has grown.

In December 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to launch the negotiations on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. The voting result was 123 in favour, 16 abstentions and 38 against; Sweden was among the European countries in favour, along with Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Malta and Switzerland. This year, four weeks of intensive negotiations took place but, unfortunately, without the participation of the nuclear-weapon states.

No NATO member, with the exception of the Netherlands, participated in the negotiations, citing that nuclear weapons remain a core component of NATO's defence strategy. In the final vote, however, the Netherlands chose to vote against. Sweden regrets that not more countries relying on nuclear deterrence followed the Netherlands' example by taking part. It goes without saying that dialogue and cooperation between nuclear-weapon states, their allies and non-nuclear-weapon states are vital for long-term and sustainable results.

Sweden's vote in favour of the treaty was entirely in line with our disarmament policy as part of a broader security policy. Our policy to address the deteriorating security situation in our neighbourhood is based on a combination of military non-alignment, active foreign policy, deepened defence policy cooperation, including with NATO, and enhanced national defence capability.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has discussed the issue on a number of occasions with the international law and disarmament delegation of experts in the field. The Committee on Foreign Affairs has been informed about the ongoing efforts, and meetings have been held with civil society organisations both in Sweden and internationally.

The treaty contains a number of prohibitions against activities involving nuclear weapons. It also addresses accession to the treaty by nuclear-weapon states, the obligation to provide assistance for the victims of the use of nuclear weapons, and measures towards environmental remediation. We would have liked the treaty to be clearer in a number of areas. One of these concerns the NPT, which in Sweden's view remains the cornerstone of disarmament and non-proliferation. Furthermore, we would have liked to see much stronger verification possibilities than the text currently provides for. Sweden pushed hard for these issues during the negotiations but unfortunately without success.

It is clear that the questions concerning the interpretation of the treaty cannot be left unanswered. The period of time between when the vote took place in the UN and when the treaty opens for signature is also unusually short. The Government therefore intends to conduct a thorough impact assessment before deciding whether to sign the treaty. It is also important to emphasise that we conduct our security and foreign policy assessments as a militarily non-aligned country with its own considerations and decisions. A decision to later ratify the treaty requires the approval of the Riksdag.

Our initial assessment shows that our bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation, including our partnership with NATO and cooperation with the United States, France and the United Kingdom, can continue. The treaty also includes prohibitions against assisting in the development, testing and manufacturing of nuclear weapons. Under our interpretation of 'assist', our defence cooperation with nuclear-weapon states is not affected as it does not include nuclear weapons. During the negotiations, it became clear that the other participating countries had the same interpretation. Our engagement in the negotiations underlines the position that has been Sweden's foreign policy for decades, that our voice for disarmament can go hand in hand with responsible security cooperation.

The treaty is an important step in strengthening the norms against the use and possession of nuclear weapons, and the Government's support for the treaty continues. We will now conduct an impact assessment with a view to signing the treaty – signing without having conducted a thorough assessment

would be irresponsible. Since taking office, the Government has once again placed Sweden at the centre of global disarmament efforts. While working to enhance our own conventional military capacity and increase our international cooperation, we also understand the importance of dialogue, diplomacy and efforts to promote peace. A nuclear-weapon-free world cannot be achieved through naivety or passivity but by striking a balance between pragmatism and clear ideals. We intend to stand up for our ideals at a time when doing so is crucial, but also because we know that Sweden's security requires long-term and sound decisions.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Published in Svenska Dagbladet 25 August 2017



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Our role in the United Nations Security Council is to prevent conflicts

Published 21 April 2017

Opinion piece by Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström, published in Göteborgs-Posten on 14 April 2017.

We live in troubled times. The terrorist attack on Drottninggatan in Stockholm just a few days ago will leave us with a permanent scar. The fight against extremism and terrorism must remain at the top of the international community's agenda. The challenges of our times require international cooperation, and Sweden has an important role to play in this.

One example is the response to the recent chemical weapons attack on civilians in Syria. Under Swedish leadership and together with nine other countries on the Security Council, we tried to agree on a resolution on a serious investigation of this outrage so that those responsible could be held to account. It is regrettable that the permanent members of the

Security Council have been unable to agree on this. This issue must be resolved in the Security Council; we must take joint responsibility for achieving a sustainable political solution. It is high time that the Syrian people are allowed to determine their own future.

As the war in Syria rages on, the UN is warning that we may be facing the largest humanitarian famine disaster since the Second World War. Countries such as Somalia and South Sudan have been struck by a severe drought that may have catastrophic consequences.

At the end of March, we also received the terrible news that Swede Zaida Catalán and her colleagues had been killed while conducting their UN peace

and security duties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Strenuous and tough job

All of this has happened in the last 100 days. And all of this – and more besides – is what we have to deal with in our day-to-day work in the Security Council. It is a strenuous and tough job – but it has produced results. I would like to outline another three concrete examples.

Sweden has laid the foundations for conflict prevention to be placed at the centre of the Security Council's work, and the new UN Secretary-General António Guterres took part in the high-level meeting on this theme that was organised during Sweden's Presidency in January.

An acute crisis in Gambia was averted during our Presidency when the transfer of power from the outgoing to the incoming president was resolved through negotiations.

We have also given those affected by the Security Council a voice in the Security Council – not least women and representatives of civil society. At Sweden's initiative, women's organisations from Somalia and Nigeria and an archbishop from the DRC have been allowed to address the Security Council, for the first time ever. We have also introduced working practices that reflect the fact that the Security Council concerns everyone, and opened the work of the Security Council up to more people through active use of social media.

We also helped ensure that the Security Council agreed on a resolution that for the first time clearly outlines the link between climate change and security in the Lake Chad region of West Africa.

I like to think of these as examples of the Swedish model in action in the Security Council: clear working methods that systematically and effectively lead us towards a more secure world. We are proud to be able to contribute to agreement among the fifteen members of the Security Council – step by step, and word by word.

Dare to ask the big questions

But we also dare to look at the big picture and ask the difficult questions. How will the UN and the Security Council tackle climate change and its consequences for international peace and security? How can we guarantee that the UN's zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse is followed? And how do we deal with the fact that the Security Council can

never be more effective than its five permanent members – each of which have a veto – allow it to be?

The answers are not clear-cut – but the questions need to be asked. This is particularly important in times like these, when the international order is often called into question. But returning to a time when cooperation is replaced by national self-interest is not an option. All of us who think the world deserves better than war, poverty and abuses must instead pick up the pace.

Political solutions the answer

Because the answers can be found in political solutions. This is why Sweden's seat on the UN Security Council is so important. It gives us an opportunity to work for global solutions for peace, gender equality and human rights where they are needed most – but also where they are most difficult to achieve.

Sweden's voice will continue to be heard in the Security Council for several hundred days more – right up to New Year's Eve 2018. We will maintain our grand visions – but also remain a voice for progress in the small victories of cooperation.

Sweden's first 100 days on the Security Council have boosted my conviction that this is both necessary and possible.

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden takes its seat on the UN Security Council

Published 03 January 2017 Updated 03 January 2017

Opinion piece by Margot Wallström in Dagens Nyheter, 2 January 2016.

Sweden's non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council has begun. In January, Sweden will also hold the Security Council presidency.

This comes at a time marked by many complex conflicts. Syria continues to be a nightmare. Tensions in our neighbourhood have increased. The EU and the UN, established in the post-war period to maintain peace, are being questioned. Increasingly, voices are being raised for isolationism and nationalism.

This is why we have no time to lose if we want to make a difference and have a positive influence on developments in the world. In 1954, Dag Hammarskjöld, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, said: "The UN was not created to take humanity to heaven, but to save it from hell." His words feel more relevant today than for a long time.

While problems do exist in the Security Council, we have recently seen evidence that progress is possible. On 23 December, the Security Council adopted the first resolution on the peace process in the Middle East in eight years. The resolution represents an important clarification, based on international law, of the international community's views on the settlements.

On 1 January, as Sweden assumed its place on the Security Council, António Guterres became the new Secretary-General of the United Nations. We are encouraged by his vision statement, with its focus on strengthening the UN's ability to prevent armed conflicts. We intend to build on this during Sweden's presidency in January. We want to:

1. Give António Guterres a good start. We intend to contribute to laying the foundations for an active and constructive relationship between the Security Council and the new Secretary-General. This is essential to enable the UN to take on the many peace and security challenges.
2. Highlight the UN's conflict prevention efforts and the link between women, peace and security. The UN must be much more effective at preventing the lapse and relapse into armed conflict, including women in peace processes and seeing the nexus between peace, security and development. We need early warnings of risks and impending crises. These must then be followed by early action, be it mediation or more forceful measures. Women's active participation in peace processes is a strategic issue for international peace and security. And it is both right and smart: studies show that peace agreements last longer when women are at the negotiating table. The voices of Syrian women, Somali women and other women must be heard in the Security Council.
3. Improve the Security Council's working methods. We want to contribute to a Security Council that is more effective, transparent and legitimate. Our working methods will be characterised by transparency and dialogue in a way that will help build both support and confidence. A range of peace actors, including civil society, should be involved.

Next week, on 10 January, Sweden will host a ministerial-level open debate on conflict prevention. We cannot ignore the warning signs, and then the next minute add another armed conflict – and more human suffering – to the Security Council agenda.

The debate will be the Secretary-General's first formal meeting with the Security Council. The aim is to give him and the Member States a basis for strengthening the UN's efforts to prevent the lapse and relapse into conflict.

We are well prepared. Sweden has been an observer in the Council and held consultations with all its members. At home, we have engaged in dialogues with the Riksdag and civil society, and we have established an expert reference council.

As a member of the Security Council, Sweden will be responsible, professional, credible, dialogue-oriented and open. Sweden's foreign policy is firmly rooted in international law, human rights, gender equality and a humanitarian perspective. Sweden will continue to combat violations of the prohibition of the use of force enshrined in the UN Charter, of human rights and of international humanitarian law. The use of the veto must be limited – especially in cases of mass atrocities such as in Syria.

As a Council member, most of our time will be dedicated to managing the situations, crises and operations that dominate the Council's work and agenda. And as the Council's agenda is driven by events – a conflict can flare up anytime – we must be prepared for the unexpected.

The international community is increasingly confronted with new challenges, such as pandemics, natural disasters, climate change and cyber threats. The entire UN system needs to manage these new types of threats to international peace and security in the 21st century.

UN peace operations must be more effective. At the same time, the Security Council, which formulates mandates for operations, must consider the capacity available to carry out the task. The sexual violence perpetrated by international troops against civilians in areas including the Central African Republic is completely unacceptable. Sweden will vigorously pursue demands for an effective zero tolerance policy.

Sweden will safeguard UN cooperation with regional organisations, not least peace and security cooperation with the EU and the African Union. As an active member of both the UN and the EU, Sweden naturally intends to contribute to strengthening cooperation between them.

There are no simple solutions to the world's many conflicts or to the tensions in the Security Council. Patient and long-term efforts are what is required. Standing up for principles and dialogue or continuing to promote gender mainstreaming can be thankless and at times difficult. Yet to build the common security and sustainable peace we believe in, it must be done.

And we will do so from our perspective as an open country that is dependent on the rest of the world in this age of globalisation. It is essential for us that the countries of the world solve problems together, and that bloodshed on the battlefield is replaced with patience at the negotiating table. Sweden will contribute to upholding the international order, at the heart of which lie the United Nations and the Security Council. Over the next two years we will do this as a member of the Security Council.

Sweden was convincingly elected to the United Nations Security Council – with 134 votes. The countries of the world have spoken. Now it's up to us to shoulder the responsibility that awaits.

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Time to visit Palestine

Published 14 December 2016 Updated 14 December 2016

Svenska Dagbladet Dec 13 2016 (in Swedish) When I visit Palestine on 15–17 December, we are just weeks away from 2017. It will then have been 70 years since the UN established the vision of a two-state solution, 50 years since Palestine was occupied and 10 years since Gaza was isolated. It will also have been almost 25 years since the Oslo Accords were signed. The issues that were then to be settled within five years remain unresolved.

The situation on the ground is serious. The two-state solution is in jeopardy. Frozen negotiations, a major expansion of the illegal settlement policy and violent acts have helped to bring about a situation in which the parties are now further from each other than perhaps ever before. Many people have lost faith in a two-state solution, particularly those born after the Oslo Accords. This was clear in the consultations that Sweden, together with some ten other countries, held in the second half of this year with almost 150 Israeli and Palestinian civil society organisations within the framework of the initiative taken by France to resume the peace process.

I am visiting Palestine to be able to talk directly with the Palestinian leadership and civil society. In my talks with President Mahmoud Abbas and Foreign Minister Riad Malki, the focus will be on Sweden's and Palestine's deepened relations. Since the Government recognised the State of Palestine in 2014, our already close bilateral ties have been further strengthened, with the opening of the Palestinian Embassy in Sweden and the visit by President Abbas to Stockholm last year. We support the Palestinian leadership in its endeavour to achieve a two-state solution by peaceful means. Following our recognition, Sweden can make clearer demands of Palestine to live up to the

international commitments the country has made.

We will discuss a series of issues, such as the importance of democratic development in Palestine, respect for human rights and gender equality. I will raise the key role of civil society and the importance of fighting corruption, stemming hate propaganda and contributing to detente and combating violence. I will also stress the importance of bridging the inner-Palestinian divisions, which are a considerable obstacle to peace and development.

In addition, I will meet representatives of Palestinian civil society organisations to find out what they are doing to create confidence in the future, contribute to a dynamic Palestine and promote a two-state solution. I also want to hear how they think Sweden can contribute. I will express Sweden's solidarity with Palestine and make it clear that our long-term commitment remains firm and that Sweden wants to continue strengthening the moderate forces in Palestine. The visit to Palestine is also important for Sweden's efforts within the French initiative for the peace process in the Middle East.

I would also have liked to visit Israel, but I note that it was not possible on this occasion. I believe in political dialogue as a way of creating a deeper insight into individual approaches and views on important issues. Sweden wishes to safeguard bilateral relations with Israel and enjoys positive cooperation in many areas, such as trade, innovation and efforts to combat anti-Semitism. I hope to be able to visit Israel at a later date. Talks with both parties are necessary to find a long-term solution to the conflict.

The present situation is unsustainable. The occupation continues and violence breaks out at regular intervals. Elections have not been held for over ten years. The Palestinian economy is on life support. The Palestinians are dependent on aid for their survival and to be able to continue residing, living and developing in their country.

It is more important than ever that the rest of the world makes an active contribution to a negotiated solution to the conflict, an end to the occupation and a future in which two states live side by side in peace and security. The rest of the world also needs to continue supporting the development of both democracy and the economy in Palestine. I hope that my visit will help strengthen hope and confidence in the future, not least among the young people in Palestine.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs



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.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

This is my goal for our time on the United Nations Security Council

Published 21 November 2016 Updated 21 November 2016

“On 1 January 2017, Sweden will assume its seat as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. This will offer Sweden a good opportunity to influence world politics and promote Sweden’s perspective on important international issues. And in yet another arena, contribute to creating conditions for a peace process in Syria,” wrote Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström in Metro on 26 October 2016.

The UN is the only global platform for international peace and security. And although the EU is Sweden's most important foreign policy arena, UN membership plays a decisive role for us.

Sweden's membership of the UN Security Council, which will begin on 1 January 2017, offers Sweden a good opportunity to influence world politics and promote Sweden's perspective on important international issues.

Being elected to the Security Council by a large majority of votes from the world's nations is recognition that Swedish foreign policy is respected and popular.

We will manage the confidence that has been placed in us in dialogue with the other members of the Security Council and with the countries that are affected by the Council's efforts, as well as with the countries contributing personnel to the UN's various international operations.

Sweden will be a professional and principled member, and will take responsibility for all the issues on the Security Council's entire agenda –

remaining prepared for the unexpected.

Sweden's actions in the Security Council will be informed by our values and principles; international law, human rights, feminist foreign policy and a humanitarian perspective will be the starting point for all our efforts.

In recent weeks, the situation in Syria has deteriorated even further. It is completely unacceptable to bomb civilian populations, attack hospitals and target humanitarian convoys. Our membership of the Security Council offers us an opportunity in yet another arena to contribute to creating the conditions for a peace process in Syria.

The Security Council must become better at both preventing conflict from breaking out and at responding earlier to signs of impending conflict. This is something Sweden will work towards, together with the UN's new Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres.

At the same time, we must be realistic. We know that the other fourteen members of the Security Council, five of whom have a veto, do not always share our views. This is a reality we will have to deal with, using the tools of diplomacy and dialogue, but never by straying from our principles.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs, I am proud of the great commitment to the UN that exists in Sweden. Sweden's work in the UN is an expression of our common pursuit of peace, solidarity and security. But also of our pursuit of justice, gender equality and sustainability.

We now need to ensure that we have an effective and popularly supported UN that is in tune with the times.

I look forward to continuing to work towards this goal.

Margot Wallström

Minister for Foreign Affairs



We in Sweden are not alone in our frustration at violations in the Middle East

Published 16 October 2016 Updated 16 October 2016

Opinion piece in SvD 16 October 2016 by Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs. The images of human suffering in Syria are heart-rending. Hospitals are bombed, and small children are dug out of the ruins. Humanitarian assistance is not getting through. It is unbearable to behold. The UN Secretary-General has likened Syria's largest city, Aleppo, to a slaughterhouse and the bombs continue to fall.

In recent weeks, an aid convoy was attacked in an act of barbarity targeting the most vulnerable. It is an outrage that this is being permitted to continue. But without a political solution to the conflict, we cannot begin to work for peace. Together with the other European prime ministers and foreign ministers, we need to put pressure on the Syrian regime and on Russia.

Firstly, what is needed is an immediate ceasefire. Since the ceasefire was broken, the bombs have continued to fall and the chasm between the parties is considerable. Last weekend, Russia once again blocked the UN Security Council from approving a resolution to bring an immediate end to the fighting. A clear signal needs to be sent to the Syrian regime and to Russia. Russia is not only responsible for its actions on the ground in Syria, it is also the country with the greatest influence over the Syrian regime.

Secondly, the suffering of the Syrian people must be alleviated. In their

efforts to defeat the opposition, the Syrian regime and Russia are exposing tens of thousands of civilians in Aleppo to indiscriminate violence, motivated by the fight against terrorism. As long as the bombs keep falling, people cannot access the humanitarian assistance – food, supplies and medical care – that the UN stands ready to provide. Since the crisis erupted, Sweden has been a staunch contributor to the UN-led humanitarian operations in Syria and its neighbouring countries. Over the last five years we have contributed a total of SEK 2.2 billion in addition to our substantial core support to the UN.

Last week, the EU launched an initiative for humanitarian access to Aleppo to ensure that aid convoys can reach those in need. The regime in Damascus must allow aid to reach all of the areas they have besieged and desist from removing medical equipment and medicines from the few aid convoys that are allowed in.

Thirdly, the issue must be raised of responsibility for the violations of international humanitarian law – the laws of war – and human rights. Both the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights have stated that it is likely that war crimes, and possibly also crimes against humanity, have been committed. Chemical weapons and other prohibited, indiscriminate weapons have been used, entire cities have been besieged and starved into surrender, a UN aid convoy has been bombed, tens of thousands of people have been arbitrarily detained, and the systematic and extensive use of torture and sexual violence has reached almost industrial proportions. Responsibility for these disgusting acts must be investigated and international justice must be done.

Next week, two important meetings will be held in Brussels: first a foreign ministers meeting, then a summit of EU leaders. It is crucial that the EU agrees on a way forward. We also made this point when the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, visited Stockholm last Monday. We in Sweden are not alone in our frustration at the violations currently taking place in the Middle East. But our long-term aim must be for the UN Security Council once again to be able to do its job, and our support for the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura remains firm.

Since 1 October, Sweden has held an observer seat on the UN Security Council, and we are therefore following the discussions on Syria closely. On 1 January 2017 we will take a seat as a member of the Security Council for two years. The Security Council's scope for action on the war in Syria is

restricted by the fact that one of the combatants – Russia – is a permanent member that therefore has the right of veto. This limits what can be achieved through the Security Council. Sweden will nonetheless try to exert an influence. In the long term, it is in the interests of every member of the international community to uphold the humanitarian law standards that have formed a part of the international security order since the Second World War. Ending the war in Syria and other conflicts will thus be the most important – and the most difficult – task of our term on the Security Council.

We will therefore seek alliances with countries both in the EU and on the Security Council to find ways of bringing about meaningful peace negotiations – with both women and men at the negotiating table – and, in the longer term, the reconstruction of a ravaged Syria. We have a frighteningly long way to go. But the images that are emerging from eastern Aleppo demand immediate and unwavering efforts from us, and from the rest of the world.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Amidst Crises, Countries Need to Invest In Sustaining Peace

Published 22 September 2016 Updated 22 September 2016

OP-ED on behalf of the Governments of Kenya, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sweden and the United Kingdom

The tragic death of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian toddler who drowned off the Turkish coast a year ago, triggered a global outpouring of emotion and calls for a more effective and humane response to support refugees and migrants.

More recently, the picture of another Syrian boy, Omran Daqneesh, sitting dazed in the back of an ambulance after an airstrike in Aleppo, drove home the immense cost of war and spurred a renewed call to end the misery.

Responses to ease suffering, however, come after the fact, after communities have been uprooted, economic livelihoods destroyed and generations lost to violence. For moral reasons, for security reasons and for economic reasons we must become more effective in preventing violent conflicts before they start.

United Nations member states now stress the need to shift from a reactive to a preventive approach and focus on addressing root causes to prevent conflict, known as the "sustaining peace agenda."

Last year, governments committed to "leave no one behind" in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Drivers of conflict originate in the kinds of structural inequality that foster grievances and hopelessness. And once allowed to take hold, violent conflict is probably the biggest obstacle to the goals included in the 2030 Agenda to end poverty, foster prosperity, promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies and protect the planet. The sustaining peace agenda and the 2030 Agenda are mutually reinforcing and

need to be implemented in tandem.

The complexity of conflicts based in inequality and exclusion means that sustaining peace requires a long-term and comprehensive approach, involving political, security, justice, development, and human rights actions in support of national efforts, with women and youth playing a central role.

This demands constant focus and leadership by the international community. In April, member states agreed to provide that. Landmark resolutions in the General Assembly and the Security Council called on the UN system to move away from siloed approaches and act in unison to achieve sustainable peace.

We, the governments of Kenya, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sweden and the United Kingdom, hope to provide momentum to the sustaining peace agenda by co-hosting a Pledging Conference for the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund.

The event, on September 21, seeks \$300 million for three years' worth of projects. Considering that 80% of humanitarian needs stem from violent conflicts, if we can prevent them, we would avoid tremendous suffering and save billions of dollars in intervention.

The Peacebuilding Fund is uniquely positioned to support countries emerging from violent conflict or at risk of descending into violence. The fund can take financial and political risks that others are not able to assume. As such, it often lays the groundwork for much larger funds to come in.

In Sri Lanka the PBF funded the resettlement of 7,000 people on land they had lost during years of conflict. In Mali, the Fund initiated the process on cantonment camps to house combatants to hand over their weapons, spurring the World Bank to commit \$26 million toward their reintegration into society after they demobilize. And in Somalia, the Fund is financing the establishment of local governments in places that have not enjoyed legitimate institutions in more than a generation.

Recapitalizing the Fund is a minor cost to pay for an effort that yields enormous dividends in terms of creating stable and just societies and the underpinnings of viable economies, not to mention prevent countless victims of violence. That is why we call on our fellow member states to invest in the Fund.

Beyond financial commitment, the sustaining peace agenda also calls for cooperation in knowledge sharing and peacebuilding through the exchange of expertise between countries facing similar adversities. Each actor has a role to play.

Because of the work of the Peacebuilding Fund and other peacebuilding initiatives in the past 10 years, we know better how to tackle the root causes of conflict and how to foster sustainable peace.

With the sustaining peace agenda now becoming a core goal of the UN's work, the organization is better positioned than ever to live up to the first line of its founding Charter: "We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war..."

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Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

European cooperation – and why we must defend it

Published 30 August 2016 Updated 30 August 2016

Opinion piece in Svenska Dagbladet 30 August 2016 by Margot Wallström, Marina Kaljurand, Linas Linkevičius, and Edgars Rinkēvičs.

We foreign ministers from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden are gathered here today in Stockholm to commemorate the fact that it is 25 years since we re-established our diplomatic relations after Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania regained their independence following the Soviet occupation.

During these 25 years, we have witnessed how the three Baltic States have developed into free democratic states and equal partners in the European Union. We have seen how economic, cultural and political contacts over the Baltic Sea, which were natural for centuries, could be resumed. Soviet oppression and the Iron Curtain were replaced by democracy and transparency. Courageous citizens of the Baltic States came together to defend democracy and independence. Early on, Sweden actively contributed to the changes and building of the societies that followed at political level and through the actions of organisations and individuals in a number of different areas. In 1990, then Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson hosted a Baltic Sea States Summit in Ronneby in which the Baltic States participated for the first time under their own flags. Close cooperation has flourished among our countries. The Baltic Sea no longer divides us, it unites us in our broad Nordic-Baltic cooperation, in the work on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and in our commitment to European cooperation.

These achievements must be constantly defended. Europe is facing major challenges. For the last few years, Russia has been openly challenging the European security order – through the illegal annexation of Crimea and the continuous aggression against Ukraine. Terrorist attacks that strike randomly,

war and conflicts in the EU's southern neighbourhood and continued refugee flows are severely testing EU cohesion. At the same time, the British people have chosen to leave the EU, which we respect but also deeply regret. The EU and the UK must continue to have a close relationship.

This is not the first time that Europe and the EU have had to tackle difficult challenges. Less than ten years ago we experienced a deep financial crisis from which we are slowly emerging. Through negotiations and compromises, the Union has always found opportunities and solutions to the problems it has faced. No country can address the challenges in a globalised world on its own, regardless of whether they involve guaranteeing our peace and security, fighting terrorism or managing refugee flows, or dealing with the threat against our energy security and climate. The only way to achieve results is through close cooperation.

We welcome the joint declaration by EU and NATO leaders at the NATO Summit in Warsaw, and we attach great value to the defence and security cooperation between our Nordic and Baltic countries. Sweden's policy of military non-alignment and the Baltic States' membership of NATO are key for our regional and international security cooperation.

For quite some time the Baltic States, being members of both the EU and NATO, remained 'energy islands' in the EU. In December 2015 the strategic energy infrastructure project, NordBalt, connecting the electricity networks between Sweden and the Baltic countries, was inaugurated. NordBalt is of significant importance to security policy in the Baltic region and enhances the Baltic countries' resilience and the security of electricity supply.

It is now necessary to look ahead and for the EU to tackle the challenges that face us – in particular in the areas that are important to our citizens. We should focus on discussing the issues that affect us the most. These include how we can develop democracy in Europe and how we can build a more secure European continent, not least in our part of Europe. They also include creating more jobs and sustainable growth, and continuing to develop a socially responsible and more gender-equal and fair Europe – a Social Europe.

The EU is also needed as a coherent force so as to contribute to a safer world. Not least, this involves the EU's crisis management capacity, preparedness to counter and strengthen resilience to hybrid threats, measures to prevent radicalisation, safeguarding respect for human rights and strengthening the role of women in peace and development. It is also

essential that we ensure democracy, stability and economic growth in both our southern and our eastern neighbourhoods. EU support to the countries of the Eastern Partnership is therefore vital. The dialogue that the EU is conducting with Russia must be clear and principled, and the sanctions must remain in place until Russia lives up to its side of the Minsk Agreement. Support to Ukraine must remain strong.

The EU's role is also crucial in the areas of energy, climate and environment. To tackle the cross-border challenge that these issues represent, a coherent and ambitious climate, energy, environmental and nuclear safety policy is necessary to ensure a sustainable future for coming generations. The EU's Energy Union, with initiatives in areas such as renewable energy, interconnections, energy security and efficiency, is important, as are joint measures for a non-toxic environment. We should promote internationally agreed nuclear safety standards to third countries to avoid potential transboundary nuclear threats arising in the immediate EU neighbourhood.

For these reasons, there is a need to strengthen the EU's capacity to act in the area of foreign policy. The recently presented European Global Strategy (EGS) for the EU's foreign and security policy is key in this respect.

We also cooperate in the EU to safeguard freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and our fundamental values, which are being challenged by disinformation and propaganda . This feels particularly relevant this year, since Sweden is celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Freedom of the Press Act, and it is 25 years since the Baltic States regained their freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

The progress we have seen in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania since the countries became members of the EU in May 2004 is remarkable. Foreign direct investment has multiplied, particularly from Sweden, which is the largest foreign investor in all three countries. Unemployment has decreased and the standard of living is considerably higher. Life expectancy has increased and the share of students at higher education institutions has risen significantly.

It is important to keep in mind the successes brought about by EU cooperation, not least for our four countries. We need to highlight that which is positive, which is often taken for granted. EU enlargement has proven to be one of the most important tools for peace, growth and prosperity in Europe. In this respect the EU's peacebuilding capability has proven to be one of the most successful in the world. It is therefore essential for the EU to

keep the door open for new members that meet the requirements set out by the EU.

The positive developments in our region – around the Baltic Sea – are intimately bound up with European integration. Let us – at the Nordic-Baltic level – continue to develop the EU together with our European partners for a strong, united and solidarity-based Europe.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sweden

Marina Kaljurand, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Estonia

Linas Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lithuania

Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Latvia



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Europe Must Help Syria's Women Make Peace

Published 21 July 2016 Updated 30 July 2016

Opinion piece in Huffington Post 21 July 2016 by Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Hind Kabawat, High Negotiations Committee.

Violence in conflict does not discriminate. Men, women and children suffer from starvation, bombings, forced disappearances and torture. They equally experience traumatic loss when driven out of their homes. This is the case in Syria, where men and women and their families uniformly face the dire consequences of war, as evident in Darayya, Aleppo and across Syria.

Yet, it is men that clearly dominate the negotiation about Syria's future. By far, men outnumber women in the ranks of the International Syria Support Group. Men outnumber women in the Syrian negotiating parties. Any sidelining of women from the peace process will have serious consequences for Syria as well as Europe's future. To secure a lasting peace, Europe must actively work on ending the marginalisation of women and ensure that they have an active role in the peace process.

Women's involvement in a peace process is critical for any solution to last. We know this from experience. In former conflicts like El Salvador in the 1990s, Northern Ireland in 1997, and Somalia and Burundi in 2000 we saw the more women are involved in the peace process, the more likely peace will hold. Women's participation broadens the understanding of the underlying issues of the conflict and helps create more sustainable, comprehensive peace agreements that garner a wider base of support. Women are not just important partners in a peace process, they are essential for enduring peace.

Syrian women are essential for developing meaningful effective solutions.

Earlier this year in preparations for the UN-led Geneva talks, a group of Syrian women representing the mosaic of Syria's different backgrounds established the opposition's Women's Consultative Committee. Sweden, with its feminist foreign policy, was quick to offer its support to the women. With its help, this team of Syrian women was active in all the opposition's efforts during the negotiations. They offered the peace process a clear, cogent view on how Syrians are working to achieve the political solution Syrians need. These women introduced innovative, detailed plans on how existing civilian state infrastructure could be reformed and integrated into a future democratic Syria working alongside Syrian civil society. Furthermore, the Syrian women secured a commitment from the opposition that any future Syrian government would have at least 30% women representation.

Last month four headstrong Syrian women from the group - several of them members of the Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee - travelled to Brussels to outline their vision for Syria to European politicians and senior officials. Among them was Bassma Kodmani, Alise Mofrej and Fadwa Mahmoud. These women are diverse in background and experience, yet expressed a uniform appeal to European leaders: stop the violence, break the sieges, release detainees and ensure accountability.

Women in Syria want a political solution. But a sustainable solution cannot be reached while their sons and daughters are starving in besieged cities, agonising from torture in Assad's prisons, systematically subjected to rape or other forms of sexual violence, or dying from bombs launched at schools and hospitals. Syrian women are calling on Europe for protecting civilians because they know this is the first step to a sustainable solution.

Europe - the EU and its member states - have provided more humanitarian aid than any other donor for the Syrian people. Despite such efforts, over 1 million Syrians still live under medieval sieges. As a humanitarian leader, Europe must demand that all sieges be lifted and that access not merely be a one-off to deflect international pressure, but sustained over time.

Accountability is also critical. Sweden, one of the countries in Europe hosting the highest number of refugees from Syria, will not be a safe haven for war criminals. In the absence of international justice, Swedish courts have started prosecuting war crimes committed in Syria with more cases in the pipeline. Other European countries should follow suite. The EU should support efforts to secure the release of detainees, including by demanding that international monitors have full, unimpeded access to all detention centres, including military prisons. Doing so would not only improve the

conditions inside Assad's jails, it would also help unlock the political process in Geneva.

European policymakers have long said that Syrian women must have a voice at the peace process. Syrian women are ready to assume that role. But the valid plans women present cannot be put into action if Europe and the world fail to establish the conditions necessary to reach peace in Syria. Europe must empower Syria's women by meeting their legitimate demands to end the violence, break the sieges, release detainees, and ensure accountability. Now is the time for Europe to lead on Syria and bring about the conditions for peace.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

This is how Sweden will make a difference in the Security Council

Published 29 June 2016 Updated 29 June 2016

Opinion piece by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström in Dagens Nyheter 28 June 2016. "Sweden has been elected. The seat on the UN Security Council is a great victory for Swedish foreign policy and Swedish diplomacy. We are convinced that as a small and open country dependent on the rest of the world, it is in our interest to contribute to and defend the international order that has at its core the United Nations and the Security Council," writes Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström (Social Democratic Party)."

Sweden has been elected to the UN Security Council. Six months ago we were considered to be out of the running. Today we have a seat on the Council. This is a great victory for Swedish foreign policy and Swedish diplomacy. For a government that stands for solidarity and cooperation, a seat on the Security Council is an acknowledgement that a global policy for sustainable peace and development pays off. For the United Nations, this means that one of its largest donors is taking its engagement and ideas, along with its demands for reform and change, into the organisation's innermost room.

During our two-year term, we will take our share of responsibility for international peace and security that membership of the Security Council entails. On 1 January 2017, when we take our seat at the table that has become a symbol of world affairs, we will do so as President, at the same time as the next Secretary-General of the United Nations takes office.

Sweden's candidacy was based on issues and a belief in dialogue and diplomacy as tools. Deeper contacts with many countries around the world have given us a better understanding of how today's challenges are perceived and experienced, but also a basis for advancing our vision of democracy and human rights, gender equality and development. This is also how Sweden will work as a member: we will listen to those concerned, defend those who need to be defended and stand up for what we believe in.

We must develop a clear and ambitious agenda in consultation with the parties in the Riksdag and Swedish organisations, with other Council members and civil society as bearers of knowledge, with the countries on the Security Council's agenda and those who contribute personnel to its peace operations:

1. Sweden intends to contribute to the main task of the Security Council: maintaining international peace and security. This means pursuing committed and informed policies on the many issues on the Council's agenda. It also means being prepared to deal with new crises and causes of conflict. The Council determines the mandate of some 25 peace operations in nearly every part of the world, adopts sanctions to prevent the supply of weapons to conflicts, and has a zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse by peacekeepers. After North Korean nuclear tests, terrorist attacks in Paris or atrocities in Syria, the world turns to the Security Council, in the same way it does when peace agreements are concluded and need to be monitored, as in Colombia. Progress is sometimes followed by deadlocks, but this must never be taken as justification for not trying. Decisions are binding for all 193 Member States. Over the next two years, it will be our role to help ensure that these will be as sound and effective as possible.
2. Conflicts must be fewer and peace more sustainable. Last year's Sustainable Development Goals and new climate agreement instilled much needed resolve in international cooperation and pointed the way to a more prosperous world. A similar breakthrough is now needed in peace and security efforts. The UN must come together to more effectively prevent relapse into conflict, include women in peace processes, and see the nexus between security, development, climate and gender equality. This is a clear agenda for Sweden, which we have long pursued and which we will bring to the Security Council. The ability to act in a timely manner must be strengthened and cooperation with the UN Peacebuilding Commission, in which we are deeply engaged, must be improved. The world cannot afford anything less than to push for peace.
3. More openness is needed – as both a goal and a means. Increased

transparency, representation and effectiveness are among Swedish UN policy objectives. This was a key message in our candidacy and will be an important dimension during our term as a member. We would like to see a reformed Security Council that limits the right of veto and that listens to, and cooperates with, others without abdicating its responsibility. Sweden itself must also work in a transparent way to help build both support and confidence. More openness is needed – because it is important in itself, because it contributes to legitimacy of the Council and, not least, because we believe it will benefit the outcome.

4. Our membership will be characterised by our values and principles. Swedish foreign policy rests on a solid foundation of international law, human rights, gender equality and a broad view of security and development. Our term on the Security Council will do the same.
5. Swedish foreign policy is conducted in various arenas: primarily in the EU, but also in the UN. Our Middle East policy promotes a peace process that will lead to a two-state solution and an end to Daesh's ruthless savagery. Our Ukraine policy remains firm in its conviction regarding implementation of the Minsk agreements, respect for the European security order and criticism of violations of international law and the United Nations Charter. Our Mali policy has put troops in the UN MINUSMA mission and police in the EU mission for training security forces. In these and other conflicts and crises, the UN and the EU work side by side. Sweden will continue to contribute to both organisations and will strengthen the cooperation between them. A strong UN benefits from a strong EU – and vice versa. The artificial 'either/or' debate must end.

In six months' time we will take our seat on the Security Council. We will be doing so at a time when, all around the world, uncertainty and insecurity are taking a toll on people's lives, and the need to work together to build sustainable peace and resilient communities has never been clearer. We will do so because we are convinced that as a small and open country dependent on the rest of the world, it is in our interest to contribute to and defend the international order that has at its core the United Nations and the Security Council. And we will do so because we believe we can make a difference – through our policies, our values and our engagement.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

A united Europe benefits both Britain and Sweden

Published 10 May 2016 Updated 10 May 2016

Opinion piece by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström in *The Local* on May 10, 2016.

The future of the EU is uncertain. This is apparent both from the referendum in the UK and the inability of the EU countries to deal with the refugee crisis. But it would be wrong to talk about a divided Europe. Thanks to the EU, Europe is united. This has fostered peace, prosperity and solidarity between the 28 Member States. We must talk about a united Europe.

At times of crisis it is also important to remember the EU's success stories. The EU is the world's largest donor of aid, the world's largest integrated economy and accounts for nearly a third of global trade. The EU's consensus on sanctions against Russia, the EU's role in the negotiations with Iran, and the EU's commitment ahead of COP21 are good examples of successful joint action. Through cooperation at EU level, we are taking joint responsibility for climate and environment issues. No single country in Europe can meet the challenges of a globalised world alone.

Having said that, we must have a dialogue among the Member States about our common values. The refugee crisis has weakened the bonds uniting the EU. One effect of this is that it has become more difficult to assert universal values in other parts of the world. We must talk about these issues in the EU, even if we start out from different positions. It is up to us national politicians to take responsibility and to dare to stand up for the common decisions made in Brussels. We – not 'they' – are the EU.

Time and again, EU enlargement has proved the most important instrument for peace, growth and prosperity in Europe. The eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004 brought more than 500 million people into the EU's internal

market. This has tangible advantages in everyday life. It means that we citizens can live, travel, study, work, seek care and retire in any EU country we wish. The common market helps to create jobs and gives us an increased supply of goods and services at better prices. Right now, roaming charges are being phased out thanks to persevering efforts at EU level.

Free movement and common regulatory frameworks have enabled Swedish companies to grow beyond national borders. Over two thirds of Sweden's trade today is with countries in the internal market. The economic benefits of the internal market are one of several strong reasons why we hope that the people of the UK will vote to stay in the EU. It is to the UK's and the EU's advantage alike. Moreover, we want to carry on working with the UK to make the EU a stronger foreign policy actor.

One important element is to strengthen the EU's social dimension. With almost 25 million people in the EU unemployed, workers' rights are under severe pressure. Now that Europe's economies are slowly recovering from the crisis years, social cohesion and welfare must also be strengthened. We are pleased that the Commission has put this issue on the agenda and has asserted the principle of equal pay for equal work. Sweden's leading role in these issues is confirmed by the appointment of our former Minister for Finance, Allan Larsson, as President Juncker's Special Adviser for the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In a social Europe, growth and social progress are mutually reinforcing. Fair conditions and high employment rates are key to sustainable economic development in Europe. If women participated in the labour market to the same extent as men, the EU's GDP could increase by 12 per cent by 2030. The social summit planned in Sweden in 2017 will provide vital impetus in driving these issues forward.

The development of Swedish welfare is intimately bound up with European integration. On our own, Sweden cannot solve the challenges of our time. Sweden will take a central and proactive part, together with our EU partners, in tackling the challenges we face. We need a strong, unified and cohesive Union.



Government Offices of Sweden

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

“New Swedish ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings”

Published 04 May 2016 Updated 09 May 2016

Opinion article, Dagens Nyheter (DN Debatt), 4 May 2016 Sweden is intensifying its efforts to combat the exploitation of women, children and poor people in the world. As the world’s first feminist government, we are creating a new position for an ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings. The position may serve as an important instrument in international cooperation, write Minister for Gender Equality Åsa Regnér and Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström.

Trafficking in human beings is one of the most serious forms of organised crime and a modern form of slavery. It is a violation of human rights and has a very strong gender equality and child rights perspective. This is why, as the world's first feminist government, we are now creating a new position for an ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings.

It is estimated that more than two million people are trafficked into slavery each year. Almost four fifths of the victims – mostly women and underage girls – are sold into the sex industry. Human trafficking does not affect individuals alone; it impacts the very structure of a democratic society by stripping individuals of their integrity and human dignity. It is a consequence of poverty and corruption, but also of a lack of gender equality. In many parts of the world, women and children are in an extremely vulnerable situation.

The offence of trafficking in human beings is a supply chain offence, consisting of many different stages, including the recruitment and transportation of victims, prostitution, trafficking in human organs or exploitation on the labour market. This criminal activity most often crosses national borders and involves serious violations of human rights.

The Government wants Sweden to be a strong voice in the world for gender equality and human rights. Women and men must have the same power to shape society and their own lives; children's rights must be strengthened. This means that the particular vulnerability of women and girls to human trafficking must be combated with the best possible measures. Sweden's efforts must contribute to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda on gender equality and children's rights. The transnational nature of the crime also demands effective international cooperation and increased coordination alongside national measures.

This is why the Government is creating a new position as Sweden's ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings. It will send an important political signal to the international community that Sweden is intensifying its efforts to combat human trafficking and the exploitation of women and children and of poor and desperate people throughout the world. Ongoing wars and conflicts, and the ensuing migration, have further aggravated the situation for many women and girls at risk of being exploited and abused.

The ambassador will strengthen Sweden's international profile as a leading human rights defender. At the same time, the position may serve as an important instrument for concrete measures to improve the effectiveness of international efforts and cooperation. Through the ambassador's work, Sweden will also help to ensure that particular attention is paid to the gender equality perspective in international efforts to combat trafficking in human beings. Sweden has much to contribute, and as a nation it can serve as a good example through the Swedish Sexual Purchases Act.

The ambassador will facilitate dialogue between various governments, national agencies and international organisations on issues focusing on the prevention of and protection against trafficking in human beings, and on the prosecution of perpetrators. The position will contribute to increased knowledge and quality in the work of relevant Swedish government agencies.

Sweden's ambassador to combat trafficking in human beings will work to:

- identify and encourage the interest of other countries in cooperating to combat trafficking in human beings, possibly through concluding bilateral agreements with Sweden, focusing on combating human trafficking and other serious crime, and actively contributing to this work;
- help share Swedish experiences of discovering and prosecuting the perpetrators of human trafficking, and protecting and supporting its victims internationally;
- advance and strengthen the gender perspective in international efforts to combat trafficking in human beings by influencing other countries to adopt legislation that criminalises the demand for sexual services, similar to Swedish legislation;
- ensure that abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children come to an end;
- identify success factors and positive experiences in efforts to combat trafficking in human beings, and make them known both internationally and among relevant Swedish government agencies;
- represent Sweden at various international events focused on issues related to trafficking in human beings;
- contribute, through international advocacy work, to a more uniform interpretation of the Palermo Protocol's definition of trafficking in human beings in the countries that have acceded to the Protocol to increase, in the long run, the chances of prosecuting involved perpetrators;
- create/resume an international network of actors (international NGOs, religious leaders, companies, professional associations, media and other opinion-makers) who through their actions can contribute to both combating human trafficking and its social and economic root causes;
- generate interest in, spread knowledge about and increase expertise on trafficking in human beings among employees at Swedish missions abroad and other Swedish actors stationed abroad, as well as at Swedish companies and organisations that have representatives who work abroad;
- conduct a dialogue at home with the Swedish government agencies and NGOs that work on human trafficking issues;
- report to the Government on the progress of international efforts to combat

trafficking in human beings, and contribute to Sweden's periodic reports to international convention committees or to other international reviews of Sweden's human rights commitments;

- strengthen the image of Sweden as a driving force in efforts to combat human trafficking and its causes, through contacts with other governments and through identifying future partners; and
- consult and cooperate with specialised structures in the UN, the EU, the Council of Europe, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and other relevant intergovernmental organisations in their work to combat human trafficking, and actively push to coordinate their action.

International cooperation on these issues involves a number of actors. At global level, the UN has a coordinating role concerning the efforts of relevant UN organisations. At EU level, there is an Anti-Trafficking Coordinator. INTERPOL and Europol are also dealing with the issue.

The Government and relevant government agencies are working constantly to combat human trafficking. Sweden is associated with human rights and democracy. Human rights are women's rights. Trafficking in human beings must be stopped.

Åsa Regnér
Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden and Finland defend free press

Published 03 May 2016 Updated 03 May 2016

Opinion piece in the EU-observer, 3. May, 2016.

Media freedom is increasingly under threat in the EU, its neighbourhood and around the world. Recent examples include repressive legislation, violence against journalists and the spread of state-controlled propaganda and disinformation.

Not only do such measures limit the work and threaten the lives of reporters, they also curtail the participation of citizens in society, undermining the very foundation of democracy.

This year, when the Freedom of the Press Act turns 250, Sweden and Finland are working together to advance our efforts to defend freedom of expression and media freedom in Europe and beyond.

Media freedom was guaranteed in Sweden and Finland 250 years ago, when the Swedish parliament passed the world's first freedom of the press act. The process was strongly influenced by Anders Chydenius, a member of the Swedish Parliament from Karleby in present-day Finland.

The act abolished the censorship of printed publications, guaranteed public access to official documents and the right to engage in political debate. In addition to defending the freedom of expression, the act has made a fundamental contribution to the development of our modern and innovative Nordic societies.

As the act now turns 250, we regret that around the world the fundamental rights and freedoms it set out to safeguard are being increasingly threatened. In many places, democracy and the rule of law are undermined, human rights are being violated and their universal nature is denied.

At the core of these challenges lies a media landscape under attack. Repressive legislation targets journalists and human rights defenders. Ever-increasing resources are spent by some states to disseminate blatant propaganda and disinformation.

Journalists are intimidated, threatened, killed and persecuted. Perpetrators are far too seldom brought to justice. In many cases, the fear of reprisals and intimidation can lead to self-censorship by journalists and media workers.

These developments call for enhanced efforts to promote freedom of expression and media freedom, including promotion of media literacy and increased support to free and independent media around the world.

Many international organisations and NGOs have expressed their concern over the deteriorating media environment.

The OSCE representative on freedom of the media, an essential institution in this area, has on a number of occasions expressed concern regarding the state of freedom of the media in the OSCE area.

Russian propaganda

The newly established EU Strategic Communication Team has repeatedly exposed Russian propaganda and disinformation, which is not only concerned with distorting truths and influencing public opinion.

It also seems intent on undermining the very notion of objective information, casting all information as biased or an instrument of political power. Such propaganda and disinformation risk undermining trust in media and institutions, and promoting the spread of online echo chambers, where conspiracy theories and half-truths are wielded against opponents and journalists.

This erodes public trust in institutions on which democratic societies are built. This is why we are working with our Nordic and Baltic neighbours to train journalists in investigative journalism and to support free and independent media in areas specifically affected by disinformation and propaganda.

The media landscape is changing rapidly, creating both opportunities and challenges for freedom of expression and media freedom. In many countries, the shift from traditional newspapers and TV to digital distribution channels

has already occurred.

The internet and social media empower people to exercise their freedom of opinion and expression and their right to access information. Today, we are all potential journalists, thanks to technological advances and social media. Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand when exercising the right to express an opinion.

New technology can be an enabler of democratic development. At the same time, technology can be used as a vehicle for spreading propaganda and disinformation. Critical thinking and source criticism are crucial in this context. The media play a key role in connecting the dots, so that citizens can be their own judge of what is the truth and what is not.

The Nordic countries are by no means immune to threats against freedom of expression. Hate speech and radicalisation, especially online, are an ever-growing concern in our societies as well.

Daesh

Daesh (another name for the Islamic State jihadist group) uses images of extreme violence on social media to influence public opinion and provoke our societies in order to increase radicalisation and recruitment.

The common practice of posting photos and videos of brutal violence and executions on social media creates fear and increases polarisation within our own societies, thereby further feeding the extremists' narrative.

The 250th anniversary of the Swedish and Finnish freedom of the press act reminds us of the long road we have travelled to promote the freedom of expression.

Developments in the wider world, however, make it clear that now is no time to stop. The Swedish and Finnish governments pledge to work even harder, and jointly with media representatives and civil society, to advance freedom of expression globally.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

Timo Soini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland



Government Offices of Sweden

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

“We must teach more countries about our Sexual Purchases Act”

Published 23 April 2016 Updated 29 April 2016

Opinion article, Expressen, 23 April 2016 France is the fourth European country to criminalise sexual purchases. We hope that more countries will take decisions in this direction, writes Sweden’s Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström and Minister for Gender Equality Åsa Regnér.

The French National Assembly recently voted to criminalise sexual purchases in accordance with the Swedish model. With this new law, the French government also wants to combat trafficking in human beings and trafficking networks – the modern slave trade.

France's position is a major success for all of us who are fighting for women's rights and the equal value of all people. It goes without saying that it should never be possible to buy another person or conduct trade in people's bodies. Prostitution is the exploitation of people and consolidates a sense of social superiority and inferiority that is harmful to individuals and to society as a whole. Everyone who is exploited is a victim, regardless of their gender, but we know that it is mainly women and girls who are exploited in prostitution and that it is often men who purchase sexual services.

Taking a stand for those who are exploited in prostitution and at the same time criminalising those who buy sex is the only right thing for a civilised society to do. People selling sex are often in a vulnerable situation and there must be no barriers to them seeking support to change their situation. This is why it is so important that selling sex is not a criminal act.

Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce a ban on purchasing sexual services. We are proud of this. In January 1999, it became a criminal offence to buy sexual services but not to sell them. France has become the fourth country, after Sweden, Norway and Iceland, to criminalise sexual purchases. We now hope that more countries will take decisions in this direction.

It is unworthy of a gender-equal society that men claim the right to have temporary sexual liaisons with women in exchange for payment, which is taking on increasingly organised forms in international criminal networks, where women's bodies are regarded as commodities.

When Sweden introduced the law against sexual purchases, it was thought that it could have a deterrent effect on potential sex buyers and reduce the interest from various groups or individuals abroad in establishing a more organised prostitution business in Sweden. This has proved to be true. Sweden is not as attractive a 'market'.

Support for the Sexual Purchases Act has remained constantly high in population studies going back several surveys. In the latest survey from 2014, 72 per cent took a positive view of the act (85 per cent among women and 60 per cent among men).

It is clear that the ban on purchasing sexual services has had a normative effect on potential buyers and has thus influenced the scope of prostitution in Sweden.

The Government has commissioned an inquiry into whether the ban on purchasing sexual services should also apply to Swedish citizens abroad. The inquiry has been tasked with investigating whether there is a need for measures aimed at ensuring greater protection in criminal law against trafficking in human beings, the purchase of sexual services and the purchase of sexual acts from children. The inquiry has received supplementary terms of reference to also look into the exploitation of vulnerable people for forced labour and begging, and it will present its report in June 2016.

The Government is now pushing for other countries to follow suit on the issue of criminalising sexual purchases, on the basis of both Article 6 (on prostitution and trade in women) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the EU Directive against trafficking in human beings. We are therefore pleased that France has now

taken this step. As Minister for Gender Equality and Minister for Foreign Affairs, we will prioritise this issue this year so that more girls and women can get the legislation on their side, against exploitation and oppression based on gender.

Sweden's feminist government feels a great responsibility to keep knowledge about the Swedish Sexual Purchases Act alive, both nationally and internationally.

Åsa Regnér
Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Two years after the illegal annexation of Crimea

Published 18 March 2016 Updated 18 March 2016

On the second anniversary of Russia's illegal annexation, European foreign ministers call for sanctions to be upheld. Opinion piece published on politico.eu March 18 2016 by Margot Wallström, Sweden; Marina Kaljurand, Estonia; Linas Linkevičius, Lithuania; Edgars Rinkēvičs, Latvia; Timo Soini, Finland; Kristian Jensen, Denmark.

Today, two years have passed since Russia illegally annexed Crimea and Sevastopol. It marked the beginning of Russia's ongoing attack on the territorial integrity of Ukraine and represents the most blatant violation in decades of the UN charter, international law and breach of the key documents that make up the European security order, such as the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris.

Since then, the human rights situation in Crimea has deteriorated dismally. Crimeans are forced to adopt Russian citizenship. Reports of torture and ill-treatment of ethnic Ukrainians and members of the Tatar community abound. The Ukrainian language is under severe pressure and media freedom is curtailed. Practically all Ukrainian TV-channels have been switched off and replaced by Russian state-controlled broadcasting. Russia's illegal detention of Crimean film maker Oleg Sentsov and social activist Oleksander Kolchenko is a flagrant example of Russia's attack on the freedom of speech in Crimea.

The most vulnerable and affected group in Crimea continues to be the Crimean Tatars, whose history is fraught with suffering and persecution. Harassed by the Russian de facto authorities, the Crimean Tatar TV station

ATR has been forced to move to Kyiv. The space for using the Crimean Tatar language is shrinking. Crimean Tatars are being targeted for prosecution and arbitrarily arrested for their alleged membership in terrorist organizations. The Russian-installed prosecutor in Crimea has recently requested to ban the activities of the Mejlis, the self-governing body of the Tatars that dates back to 1991, with the intention to label it as an extremist organization. Continuous violations of the freedom of expression and opinion as well as the freedom of belief are also frequently reported. Accounts of enforced disappearances and suspected killings committed by the de facto authorities are particularly alarming.

Crimea is not forgotten. Russia needs to be held accountable. The Crimean Tatars and other Crimeans affected by Russia's repressive policies have to be supported.

As we mark the second anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea, we reconfirm our unwavering support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and its sovereignty over its entire territory. The EU's non-recognition policy of the annexation is the clearest and most effective manifestation of our support. The EU has initiated an import ban on products originating from Crimea, and banned investments as well as export of certain categories of goods and services to Crimea. EU sanctions specifically target Russian companies that operate in Crimea. And sixty persons involved in the illegal annexation of this piece of Ukrainian land are banned from travelling to the EU and have had their assets frozen in the EU.

But we should remain vigilant. Together with other countries that have followed suit, such as Norway, Iceland, the USA, Canada, Australia, etc. we must constantly, and in no uncertain terms, restate our unwavering commitment to the key principles of international law and the European security order. Letting Russia's actions pass unchecked would be a recipe for more instability and less regard for international law as future aggressors would no longer be deterred by the cost of such behavior. Therefore, the EU non-recognition policy and the sanctions must be kept under constant review, to remove loopholes and to make sure that they are effective. They will remain in place as long as Russia's illegal annexation continues.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

Marina Kaljurand, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia

Linas Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania

Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia

Timo Soini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Kristian Jensen, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Syria's peace talks need more women at the table

Published 08 March 2016 Updated 08 March 2016

Opinion piece by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström in The Guardian on March 8, 2016.

The human suffering in Syria is beyond comprehension. Years of conflict have forced millions from their homes and left hundreds of thousands dead or wounded. A whole generation is growing up without security and without proper access to education and healthcare. The only long term solution to the Syrian conflict is a political one. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the peace talks resume and continue towards tangible results.

The fact of the matter is that:

- Almost half of all peace agreements fail within five years.
- Women so far have been dramatically under-represented in peace processes.
- Recent research from the Philippines and the ongoing Colombian peace talks show that inclusive peace processes, where both women and men participate, substantially increase the likelihood of peace agreements being reached and sustained.

If the parties involved in the peace talks do not include women, can they be obliged to in order to improve the chances of success? We can at least support the women who choose to assert themselves, and there is no lack of them.

The Swedish government is working on bringing Syrian women to Geneva to make sure they are heard in the peace process. I talk to these women via Skype and try to support them in every way possible. I know they will be strong voices for peace and dignity.

Half of the population of the world is female. We cannot have a situation where they are not represented at the negotiating table. It is also my firm belief that having women represented in the peace talks will result in more options to work with.

The empowerment of women and girls is a true example of smart politics. It transcends the divide between hard and soft security that enables effective and sustainable peacebuilding. Sixteen years since the adoption of UN security council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, we can firmly state that the promotion of gender equality is not only a matter of women's rights, but also, more importantly, a matter of ensuring peace and security for all.

A successful peace process is not just about reaching a ceasefire. It is also about justice, education, health, reconciliation and the fair distribution of resources. No warlord can achieve this. A sustainable peace process lays the foundation for resilient institutions that promote economic, political and social emancipation for all.

Peace processes, therefore, need to be inclusive. Women must actively participate in all decision-making processes at all levels and be active in defining priorities and resource allocation, in times of peace and in times of war.

Wherever I have travelled in the world, from Ukraine to Colombia to the Democratic Republic of Congo, I have met brave women who strive to de-escalate violence and promote initiatives for peace, often in very dangerous environments where the personal risks are extreme. The work of these women deserves our full support and long-term commitment.

As part of my government's broader feminist foreign policy, we have also initiated a Swedish network of women peace mediators and are simultaneously taking part in the development of a Nordic women's mediator network. The goal of this process is not only to strengthen our national capabilities, but also, more importantly, to cut across traditional divides and create cooperative networks with international women mediation teams from across the globe.

Mediation must be recognised as the real weapon for peace. Both the security council and the general assembly have committed to strengthening the UN's mediation capacity. Important work has been done, but we still have a long way to go.

The situation in the world calls for a feminist foreign policy that aims to strengthen women's rights, representation and access to resources. We will continue our work to involve women in peace processes to help ensure a more sustainable society.

To put it simply: more women – more peace.



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

Mediation: the real weapon for peace

Published 29 January 2016 Updated 29 January 2016

Opinion piece by Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström and Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs Timo Soini in *Sydsvenskan* and *Huffington Post* 29th of January, among others.

We're closing the books on a year that has brought successes for diplomacy but also horrible reminders of its failures. Persistent and patient negotiations resulted in an agreement on the nuclear issue between the so called EU3+3 and Iran. The peace process in Colombia shows great promise for ending decades of conflict. Meanwhile, and despite recent diplomatic efforts, the war in Syria rages on and has left tens of thousands dead and millions displaced. The UN has launched an appeal to assist almost 90 million people across 37 countries, most of which are in conflict.

If there is one clear conclusion to draw, it is this: it is possible to prevent violent conflicts, yet most of the time we fail. We have spent hours in the past negotiating responses, but we have mostly been unable to put the same enduring effort into prevention. The consequences are disastrous. This needs to change. We must recommit to mediation.

First, stronger UN. Mediation is a core task of the United Nations. The UN is the most significant global mediation actor, and often the only one seen as impartial and entrusted to work in conflict situations. Both the Security Council and the General Assembly have committed to strengthen the UN's mediation capacity, but somehow this has not translated into action.

As the UN is now reviewing its peace and security agenda, it is crucial that it shows genuine leadership and sends a clear signal that persistent mediation, conflict prevention and peace building are genuine priorities. With Finland as

co-chair of the UN Group of Friends of Mediation and Sweden as the chair of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, we have solid platforms, from which we are working hard to make sure that mediation gets the recognition and resources it needs.

There is an increasing understanding among the UN member states that mediation is an efficient way to prevent conflicts. It is far less costly than trying to fix what has once been broken, it safeguards development gains and – most importantly – it saves lives.

Second, more women – more peace. Promoting peaceful and secure societies for all cannot be done with the participation of just a selected few. For peace agreements to be sustainable, more women must contribute to peace negotiations. Recent research highlights the positive link between women's meaningful participation in peace processes and the likelihood of peace agreements being reached and sustained.

Sweden and Finland are supporting initiatives to train women for peace processes and to strengthen gender expertise and capacity in UN mediation. In for example Iraq, where women have suffered tremendously from recent violence, Sweden has taken an active role in supporting local women peace builders and women human rights activists. Finland is supporting civil society, including women's organisations, and efforts enabling local ceasefires and peace-making in Syria. Together with other Nordic countries, we have formed a Nordic Women Mediators' Network, as one response to the need to increase women mediators in the field and to strengthen women as agents for peace. Inclusion has other dimensions as well. Civil society and local communities must be taken aboard in peace-making.

Questions relating to religion have to be included when searching for solutions through mediation. Intercultural and interfaith dialogues can be part of this process. We welcome the work of the global Network for Religious and traditional peacemakers in helping UN in its comprehensive work for peace.

Third, states and regional organisations need to take responsibility. A more able UN is also a UN working in tandem with regional organisations. We welcome the close cooperation with the African Union, as well as with other regional and sub-regional organisations that might be the first to sense and understand early warning signals. The European Institute of Peace, launched last year at the initiative of Sweden and Finland, aims at augmenting the global peace agenda of the EU, through mediation and

dialogue. We encourage other initiatives to strengthen our collective capacity for mediation. In a world as insecure, volatile and vulnerable as today, all hands are needed on deck.

The book on 2015 will be a rather gruesome reading. We must at least show that we've learnt the lessons it tells: to make mediation and conflict prevention a genuine priority. There are no alternatives.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice

The battle against anti-Semitism and racism must always be fought

Published 27 January 2016 Updated 27 January 2016

SVT Opinion, 27 January 2016

Today we mark Holocaust Remembrance Day. Seventy-one years have now passed since the death and concentration camp Auschwitz was liberated and the whole world was able to see the appalling images of the victims of Nazism. The Holocaust committed against six million Jews and the genocide of half a million Roma and 2.5 million Poles and other minorities, homosexuals, sick people and political dissidents was one of the most terrible crimes of the 20th century.

The Jews and members of other minorities who fell victim to the Holocaust were murdered because they belonged to an ethnic minority group. How could anti-Semitism and racism have had such an influence in Europe, enabling the Holocaust to happen? There are of course many explanations and the answer is not a straightforward one, but the radicalisation of the 1930s and 1940s, the hate propaganda and divisions in Europe, as well as the inability of the democratic forces to take timely action against anti-Semitism and fascism most certainly played an important role.

It must never happen again. The responsibility for managing the memory of the Holocaust is therefore a matter of both honouring the memory of the millions of victims and combating anti-Semitism and racism. Knowledge is an antidote against anti-Semitism, Afrophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Ziganism and fascism. The Government is conducting a number of measures to ensure that the atrocities of Nazism and racism are not forgotten. The Living History Forum has been given a broader mandate, the National Agency for Education is carrying out initiatives to improve knowledge in schools and a national plan against racism is being implemented.

But spreading knowledge is not enough. Anti-Semitism and racism are still prevalent in Sweden and Europe. In Europe, anti-Semitism is once again claiming lives. The terrorist attack against a kosher shop in connection with the massacre at the editorial office of magazine Charlie Hebdo in January last year, the terrorist attack against the Copenhagen synagogue in February last year and the attack against the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014 are three examples.

This development is utterly unacceptable. One of the fundamental duties of a state under the rule of law is to protect citizens against violence and threats, especially when they are perpetrated by groups and people who do not accept the fundamental principle of the equal value of all people. In both Sweden and other EU countries, security services are now taking forceful action to combat Daesh and other terrorist groups.

In Sweden too, unacceptable attacks against Jews have occurred. The Government is aware that the total number of reported hate crimes and hate crimes with anti-Semitic motives are on the rise; for this reason, more measures need to be carried out to combat these hate crimes. The Swedish Police Authority is raising its level of ambition and greater resources are being invested in combating hate crimes. All cities and large towns now have special departments within the police force to combat this type of crime. We will see the establishment of a national consultation forum, in which representatives of vulnerable groups can have a direct dialogue with the police and other government agencies so as to improve cooperation concerning hate crimes. The Government will closely monitor the work of the police so that these measures genuinely result in more hate crimes being solved. The Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities will also distribute a minimum of SEK 10 million to faith communities for measures to enhance security.

The battle for the equal value of all people and against anti-Semitism and racism is a part of foreign policy. Sweden and the EU have a major duty to stand up for the values of the freedom and equal rights of all people upon which our societies are based when we formulate and conduct our foreign policy. Sweden is also working to strengthen a culture of dialogue and promote democratic developments so as to undermine the conditions that foster extremism. Xenophobia, hopelessness and distance from political processes do not create extremist ideologies, but they make people more susceptible to fascist, racist and anti-Semitic ideas. This work is being done not least through setting priorities for Swedish development cooperation.

Events in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s show that racism can threaten the democratic order. Anti-Semitism and racism are not just a threat against the groups targeted by such hatred; they are a threat against society as a whole. In this sense, our open and democratic society is also a victim of the threats and attacks that target individual groups, such as Jewish communities, because these attacks strike the foundation of our country: an open, democratic, free and inclusive society.

The battle against anti-Semitism must always be fought. It is a battle for the rights of individuals, but also for an open and democratic society.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Anders Ygeman, Minister for Home Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden an asset to the UN Security Council

Published 02 December 2015 Updated 02 December 2015

Opinion piece by Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström in Svenska Dagbladet on 2 December 2015.

We are living in a time when we are confronted close up by global challenges. Our southern neighbourhood is marked by difficulties with regard to the refugee crisis and the underlying conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, as well as the terrorism of ISIL/IS and other groups, and the impact of climate change. The situation in our eastern neighbourhood too, with Russia's aggression against Ukraine, is a clear example that our view on international law and security is necessary.

As a small, free and democratic country, Sweden is dependent on global cooperation to take on our common challenges. At the heart of these efforts is the UN and in particular the Security Council. For Sweden, cooperation in the EU is an indispensable platform, which can also make the UN stronger.

The Security Council is the only UN body whose decisions are legally binding for all member states. Sweden's candidacy for a seat in the Council is about our voice in multilateral cooperation, which is one of the cornerstones of our foreign policy; it is also about taking part in the discussion on conflicts that have an impact on our own society.

The Security Council's decisions make a difference. On 20 November, a unanimous Security Council passed a resolution on the fight against ISIL and terrorism. The Security Council has recently also adopted measures to increase women's participation in peace efforts and passed a resolution supporting the EU's action against human smuggling in the Mediterranean.

It does matter who has a place in the Security Council. One example of a

non-permanent member that has gained influence is Lithuania, which during this year in the Security Council has ensured that Ukraine has remained on the agenda, despite the risk of it slipping off in the light of other crises. A country such as Sweden, with our credibility in development issues, our human rights work and our ability to speak with integrity and without a hidden agenda, can make a difference.

It is precisely in situations when the Council is threatened with paralysis that it is important that the Council has non-permanent members that take action to ensure that the Council takes its responsibility. The deadlocks between the permanent members are deeply regrettable – this is why Sweden is working for a reformed and effective Security Council with a more representative circle of members and less use of the veto.

All parties in the Riksdag support the candidacy. We are presenting our candidacy as a critical friend to the UN and with an awareness of the importance of common global solutions. Sweden is the sixth largest donor to the UN system and a keen advocate of reform and greater effectiveness, and of action by the Security Council in war and conflicts. We must not abdicate influence. This is not a time to shirk responsibility.

Our candidacy is going well. The competition is tough, but we are hopeful. Besides Sweden, two other EU countries are candidates: Italy and the Netherlands. Sweden was the first of these countries on the scene, announcing our candidacy back in 2004. It has been twenty years since we last sat in the Council. We agree that it is unfortunate that EU countries are competing against each other. Sweden has sought to avoid this within the EU.

We have gained increasing support through an intensifying campaign. We see that there is respect for Sweden as a global actor and for our tradition of solidarity and dialogue, and for the fact that we stand up for principles and values. For the same reason, there are many countries that want to see us gain a seat in the Security Council.

Our candidacy efforts do not involve us compromising on fundamental principles such as human rights – as some might maintain. On the contrary, this candidacy is about gaining a platform for our values. Our candidacy efforts require that we conduct a dialogue with all of the other 192 UN member states, which is crucial, irrespective of our candidacy, for an understanding of the global problems and to be able to contribute to solutions.

Our candidacy to the Security Council is about Sweden's possibilities to influence the troubled world in which we live. A seat in the Security Council would mean an additional platform for us to pursue our policies. Sweden can take a seat at the table and put forward opinions and values that influence the world in a positive direction. This is why Sweden should have a seat in the Security Council.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Joint opinion piece by ministers of Foreign Affairs in Sweden and Lithuania

Published 17 November 2015 Updated 17 November 2015

Opinion piece by Ministers for Foreign Affairs in Sweden, Margot Wallström, and Lithuania, Linas Linkevičius, in *Ukrainskaja Pravda* 17th of November 2015

As we arrive today in Kyiv, almost two years have passed since people took to the streets in Ukraine with legitimate calls for reform and European integration. The subsequent deplorable turn of events is the tale of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and further military aggression against Ukraine.

Lithuania and Sweden have been among the most vocal supporters of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Our two countries have been at the forefront in condemning Russia's violations of international law. What Russia has done in Ukraine poses a challenge that reaches beyond Ukraine's borders and calls into question the fundamental principle that all nations are entitled to make their own foreign policy choices. Therefore, we argue that EU sanctions against Russia will have to be kept in place until the territorial integrity of Ukraine is restored, which includes Ukrainian control over its own, internationally recognised borders. For Russia to put itself back on the path toward improved relations with the rest of Europe, it needs to demonstrate, in a tangible manner, its commitment to European principles and international law.

But Russia's aggression must not cause us to overlook the bigger picture: Ukraine has launched a reform programme unequalled in scope and ambition since its independence while at the same time facing hostilities and

humanitarian suffering. Therefore, we acknowledge the courage and commitment of the Ukrainian leadership. These reforms, first and foremost, serve the benefit of the Ukrainian people – and aim to make Ukraine a successful European democracy. The European Union stands committed to Ukraine's success.

Important and bold reforms are under way in many key areas, including the energy sector, the system of local government (where decentralisation will bring political decision-making closer to the people and hopefully increase the level of trust among the general public) and the management of public finances. The EU Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area have served as a roadmap and the Eastern Partnership provides a reinforcing framework for our relations. But the implementation of these reforms needs to be accelerated as results are still not being felt by the general public. This is particularly true in the area of anticorruption and the influence of oligarchic structures.

We argue that more efforts are urgently needed in some key areas:

- The EU's long standing calls for improved rule of law and a reformed justice sector in Ukraine are part of the framework of the EU-Ukraine relations and important progress has been made by Ukraine. But according to a recent poll, only 5 per cent of Ukrainians trust the court system. This shows that more needs to be done to strengthen the independence, integrity and accountability of the judiciary, including the Prosecutor General's Office. The judiciary needs to be free from political interference and corruption. The anticorruption prosecutor needs to be truly independent and selected in a fair and transparent process. On our part we as the EU should redouble its support of rule of law in Ukraine, including by giving the EU assistance mission for civilian security sector reform, EUAM, more teeth and a broader mandate.

- Ukraine has made important steps towards reducing its energy dependency on Russia and towards a more sustainable energy consumption. But Ukraine continues to use three times more energy per person than the EU average. Greater energy efficiency would enhance both the state budget and national security. The radical reduction of gas subsidies is important, but more is needed to reduce consumption, increase energy efficiency and help consumers influence their consumption patterns. The Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P) is designed to respond to such needs, and together the EU, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and Ukraine need to do more to ensure that it delivers results.

- Ukraine has made important head way towards fulfilling the benchmarks for visa freedom. The EU Visa Liberalisation Action Plan for Ukraine contains strict conditions on anti-corruption, migration management and fundamental rights which Ukraine has to meet without exception. Defending all human rights is a vital in this regard, including through the adoption of a labour code that forbids discrimination in work places. On the EU side, we should assist Ukraine in carrying out the required reforms. We should also stand by our commitment to grant visa freedom once technical conditions are met and conditions for well managed and secure mobility are in place, as was the case for Moldova.

- Improved gender equality and strengthening of women's rights would allow Ukraine to unlock its full social and economic potential. The conflict in the Donbas region has exacerbated the problem of violence against women, and ensuring legal protection of women's rights is more important than ever. Ukraine has made important progress towards the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (Istanbul Convention). We look forward to the early ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the Ukrainian parliament, which would serve as a role model for the rest of the region.

Successful reforms require patience and resolve. Ukraine and the EU have embarked on a long journey together, but we remain confident that it will lead us to the modern and rule-based Ukraine that the people taking to the streets two years ago demanded.



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden engages for peace and stability as a friend of Israel

Published 10 November 2015 Updated 10 November 2015

Haaretz, 10 November 2015 A major challenge for peace is the absence of hope. The international community stands ready to support the parties to make courageous choices and revive a development towards a two-state solution, which entails equal rights for two peoples. Sweden has a long history of engagement for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, and we continue these efforts as a friend of Israel, says Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden.

The Middle East is experiencing unprecedented turmoil, unrest and suffering. Israel finds itself in a precarious situation in a complex region, where violence as a political means is all too common. I have respect for Israeli security concerns, and believe that they are best dealt with in partnership with Israel's neighbours. The recent escalation of violence in Israel and Palestine is deeply troubling. All acts of violence and terror are deplorable and should be condemned by all. I express my deep condolences to the families of the victims. In terms of numbers of dead and wounded, this autumn has been the worst in Israel and Palestine in a long time. Excessive force must be avoided and all responses proportionate. Perpetrators must be brought to justice by due process.

In this situation, it is easy to distrust "the other side". Fear and distrust are enemies of peace. Recent polls among Palestinians and Israelis show that they are losing hope that the vision of the two-state solution will ever become a reality. Twenty years after the tragic murder of Yitzhak Rabin and the signing of the Oslo Accords, the window of opportunity seems to be

slowly closing before our eyes. Yet we cannot give up on the long-standing vision of a safe and secure Israel living peacefully alongside an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state.

The recent escalation of violence reminds us once again that the current situation is not sustainable. The absence of a political solution to this conflict can only lead to an endless circle of violence, deterrence and retaliation. Security is essential and nobody should have to live with a constant feeling of fear. Israel has a right and a duty to defend itself and its people from acts of terror. But security measures alone cannot make Israel truly safe. To date, repression of “the other side”, including rigorous measures of separation and the isolation of Gaza, has not proven successful in meeting the security needs of the Israeli people. I am confident that a lasting political solution would not only bring more security, but also economic prosperity to both Israelis and Palestinians, and that it is best achieved together with regional stakeholders, among others, on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative.

Sweden has a long tradition of engagement in the Middle East Peace Process, dating back to the UN mediation of Folke Bernadotte in the 1940s. The issue of Israel and Palestine has remained a foreign policy priority for the Social Democratic party throughout the decades, with many initiatives to support on-going peace efforts. Sweden is a large contributor to humanitarian assistance in Gaza. The Swedish Government’s development cooperation with Palestine focuses on strengthening the transparency and accountability of the Palestinian Authority, increased respect for human rights including gender equality, private sector development and catastrophe resilience. The wellbeing of Israel’s Palestinian neighbour is also in Israel’s best interest.

One year ago, Sweden recognised the State of Palestine. I said then that this was a necessary step, aimed at making a positive contribution to the dormant peace process. It was intended to send a clear message of hope to younger generations that there is an alternative to violence and the so-called *status quo* in a situation where the conditions for the viability of a two-state solution were eroding. It was also intended to recognise the fact that Israelis and Palestinians have equal rights and obligations as well as equal needs for security.

Critical voices have been raised regarding the Swedish recognition of the State of Palestine, some even calling it “anti-Israeli”. But let me be clear on this. Sweden has a long history of friendship with Israel. We are and will remain a good friend. We cherish the cooperation in many areas with Israel,

one of our main trading partners in that part of the world. We have a lot in common as small innovative economies with highly educated, curious and creative populations. We want to deepen the multifaceted nature of these bilateral relations.

However, good friends are also honest in their criticism and disagreements, such as our disagreement on Gaza's isolation and the illegal Israeli settlement policy. Sweden supports the EU policy of differentiation between Israel, within the 1967 borders, and the settlements. It is with concern that we see Israel, a democracy in a turbulent region, drifting away from international law and risking the erosion of its international standing.

I believe that a better, and mutually beneficial, future can be built for both peoples, if courageous decisions are made. It is time to show leadership, responsibility and restraint, translated into concrete action. Now is the time to:

- create conditions for a results-oriented peace process, including confidence-building measures;
- reach international consensus on clear parameters and realistic time frames for negotiations, including an end to the occupation;
- move towards full implementation of agreements reached between Palestine and Israel;
- create a conducive environment for economic development in all of Palestine, including access to area C and Gaza;
- encourage progress towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation; and
- end the isolation of Gaza and ensure access and accountability for international development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

Sweden and the international community as a whole have a joint responsibility to restore and reinforce our common hope, and the hope of Palestinians and Israelis, that a just and comprehensive peace is possible. With political will and courage, it can be achieved. Sweden stands behind Israel and Palestine in these difficult times. Looking ahead, we are ready to continue to support all efforts to fulfil the vision of a two-state solution.

Margot Wallström
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden



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

We owe it to the victims never to forget

Published 12 July 2015 Updated 12 July 2015

Aftonbladet, 11 July 2015

In July 1995 Srebrenica was overrun by Bosnian Serb forces. Over the course of a few days, about 8 000 Bosnian Muslims were executed. Admir Buljbasic's father, Hamdija, and his brother Safet died in the genocide – the worst massacre in Europe since the Second World War. But Admir survived. Today he lives in Sweden, like 60 000 others whose country of birth is Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Many of us recently read about Admir's trip back to Srebrenica. At the Podrinje Identification Project in Tuzla, they have identified the remains of his father. The story is harrowing, and reminds us of what former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: "The tragedy of Srebrenica will haunt our history forever."

Through Kofi Annan and in other ways, the UN has admitted that the organisation did not do enough to protect the population of Srebrenica. In 2005, as a lesson learned, the UN adopted the Principle of the Responsibility to Protect.

Another consequence is that UN peacekeeping operations have been reformed. The Security Council's mandate is clearer and civilian protection has been given greater emphasis.

I visited Bosnia and Herzegovina when I was the UN's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. I met women who were victims of systematic rape. UN Resolution 1325 and subsequent Security Council resolutions have strengthened our capacity to combat sexual violence, which is still used as a strategy of war and a weapon of terror.

Peace and reconciliation cannot be achieved if the perpetrators of these crimes go unpunished. This is why the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague is still important today.

However, in connection with the 20 year commemoration of the genocide, we are forced to note that while resolutions and new tools have been developed, the international community's efforts often end in deadlock. Our humanitarian systems are overburdened by the world's forty armed conflicts, eleven of which are large-scale wars. Refugee flows are reaching levels not seen since the Second World War.

My conclusion is that a strong European Union is a prerequisite for a more effective United Nations. But this requires the EU to increase its engagement on its own continent, where EU enlargement has proven to be one of the most important instruments of peace, stability and prosperity. Today's memorial ceremony will therefore also be an opportunity to reaffirm Sweden's strong desire to contribute to progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans.

When Sweden joined the EU 20 years ago, the future of the Baltic and central European states in the European Union was uncertain and much debated. Today, no one questions these countries' membership of the EU. Our vision must be that EU membership for the Western Balkan countries will seem just as natural in 20 years' time.

Our political support to the Western Balkans has gone hand in hand with extensive development cooperation. After the war, support went primarily to actual reconstruction of housing and infrastructure. Today, it involves intensifying reform efforts for democracy, rule of law, human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability and economic development.

Admir Buljubasic's father, Hamdija, will be buried during today's memorial ceremony. He will be laid to rest beside his son Safet, Admir's brother.

We owe it to them never to forget. And we promise to stand firmly beside Bosnia and Herzegovina on its peaceful path to EU membership.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

A new landmark in India-Sweden relations

Published 01 June 2015 Updated 01 June 2015

The Hindu, 30 May 2015

On May 31, Sweden will have the great honour and pleasure of welcoming President Pranab Mukherjee, on the first ever state visit by an Indian President to Sweden. This historic visit offers a unique opportunity to deepen our long-standing relationship.

Swedish companies began investing in India in the early 1920s, laying the foundations for the prosperous partnership between our business communities that is still enjoyed today. Formal diplomatic relations between India and Sweden were established as early as 1948. Alva Myrdal, Sweden's first ambassador to India and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982 for her promotion of nuclear disarmament in the United Nations, often claimed to be fired by the ideals of social justice and pacifism held by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Similarly, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's Action Plan for Ushering in a nuclear weapon-free and non-violent world order sprang from years of close collaboration with Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. India and Sweden also share rich democratic traditions. As the largest democracy in the world, India is a source of inspiration. The principles of democracy rest on human rights — the idea that by virtue of being human, we share the same rights and freedoms. Our two countries are both engaged in actively promoting and safeguarding these principles.

Women's full enjoyment of human rights is a top priority for Sweden, domestically as well as globally. Rather than perceiving gender equality merely as a goal in itself, we regard equality to be a prerequisite for achieving our wider foreign and security policy objectives. Sweden's feminist foreign policy aims to respond to one of the greatest unresolved problems of our time, namely that the human rights of women and girls are

still being violated in so many ways around the world. Human rights are women's rights. Progress in empowering women and women's representation and rights benefits society as a whole. It is my firm belief that India and Sweden can work together as partners to find ways of addressing this critical challenge, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

Trade and investment

Bilateral trade between India and Sweden has increased remarkably over the last few years. Today, more than 150 Swedish companies are established in India, and one new company is estimated to be registered every month. These companies provide employment — directly and indirectly for almost 7,50,000 people in India. As a nation heavily dependent on exports, Sweden regards free trade as a driver of economic growth, but not at the expense of people or the planet. For this reason, my government works actively to bring about progressive international trade agreements that dismantle trade barriers and, at the same time, we promote corporate social responsibility to protect the rights of employees and the environment.

As one of the largest and fastest growing economies in the world, India is increasingly attractive to foreign investors. Major reform programmes launched by the government of India, such as Make in India, Smart Cities and Digital India, send a clear message to the world: India is open for business and investments.

In the last few years, Sweden and India have signed a long list of agreements in areas such as science and technology, health, environment and renewable energy. I am truly impressed and encouraged by the broad range of relations between our two countries and I believe there is great scope for enhanced collaboration.

Addressing the issue of rapid urbanisation, the Indian government has set out to build 100 smart and sustainable cities. This initiative offers a great opportunity for cooperation between our two countries. Sweden is a world leader in business solutions and innovation in green technology, energy and logistics. Investments in the rapidly growing sector of sustainable urban development are critical for the global environment and the climate challenge that we face — common challenges that our countries must tackle together.

In September 2014, during his first address to the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Modi spoke with conviction about an

“unwavering belief in multilateralism” deeply rooted in Indian society. Sweden shares India’s strong commitment to promote global cooperation within the framework of the United Nations.

The United Nations is the heart of global dialogue. It was founded 70 years ago on the belief that nations of the world can meet collective challenges only by working together. And in today’s increasingly uncertain world, effective multilateralism — with the UN at its core — is perhaps more important than ever. Strong support for the United Nations has always been — and will always be — key to Sweden’s foreign policy.

Our efforts to internationalise global challenges have proven influential in the past. The attendance of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 became a milestone in global environmental cooperation. Looking ahead towards the upcoming Paris Climate Conference in December, it is significant that equitable and sustainable development, as defined in Stockholm over 40 years ago, is now at the top of the agenda. We must continue to push for a resolute international agreement addressing climate change. Our collaboration in this area is of great importance to my government. President Mukherjee’s visit to Sweden represents a new landmark in the excellent and long-standing relationship between our countries. As Indo-Swedish relations continue to evolve, our two countries should commit to joint efforts that reflect the shared values at the heart of our strong relationship.



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

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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 of Defence, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Government proposes Swedish armed force in military training operation against ISIL

Published 09 April 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

DN Debatt 9 april 2015

The terrorist organisation ISIL, also known as IS, has spread death, destruction and fear. We have all witnessed the way in which people have been murdered or forced to flee, and communities have been wiped out, as a result of its ravages in Syria and Iraq. We have seen out-and-out atrocities towards people with differing beliefs and large-scale abuses. And we are forced to note that ISIL is also attempting to extend its terrorism to other parts of the world, including Europe.

Sweden, along with all other EU Member States, is therefore among the countries participating in the international coalition of some 60 countries that has been formed to fight ISIL in various ways, stabilise Iraq and manage the consequences of this terrorist organisation's ravages.

So far, Sweden has chosen to focus its support on a two-pronged approach: dealing with the urgent crisis, which is a matter not least of humanitarian assistance, and seeking political means to achieve a long-term solution to the underlying political problems in the region that have allowed ISIL to gain a foothold.

We have provided extensive humanitarian assistance to those who have been forced to flee from their homes in Syria and Iraq and we also support the stabilisation measures planned in areas secured from ISIL. Like others, we are also taking steps to prevent possible sympathisers from travelling to the region to take part in terrorist actions or terrorist training.

In parallel with this, we are supporting political processes aimed in the long

run at eliminating the breeding grounds of terrorist organisations such as ISIL. This support takes the form of backing UN efforts to find a solution to the violence and civil war in Syria, and promoting an inclusive and cohesive Iraq, in which strengthened democratic institutions will enable the country's many different religious and ethnic groups to influence developments. The emergence of a society under the rule of law is necessary to fight terrorism in the long term.

Iraq is in a position where military support is also needed to stop ISIL. At the request of the Iraqi Government, the international coalition is therefore providing the Iraqi defence forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga units, with aerial support and training.

Thanks to this cooperation, it has been possible to check ISIL's offensive and areas that were formerly held by ISIL have been secured. One example is Tikrit, which was liberated from ISIL's violence last week. This proved once again that ISIL can be defeated. But that this requires joint efforts.

Since the winter, the Government has been investigating the possibility of Sweden participating in these joint military operations. Today, the Government is presenting a proposal for Sweden to participate in the military training operation in northern Iraq.

The Government proposes that the Riksdag allow a Swedish armed force consisting of 35 persons to be made available in 2015 to participate in the military training operation being carried out by the international coalition against ISIL in northern Iraq. The Swedish Armed Forces will put together an all-round, fit-for-purpose force to manage the tasks included in the operation. Should the security situation deteriorate, the Swedish Armed Forces will be able to make temporary reinforcements to a level of 120 persons for evacuation and reinforcement operations. The Government's decision is based on Iraq's request for assistance to stop ISIL, which also provides the basis for the operation in international law.

The main tasks of the planned Swedish contribution will be training and advice to the Iraqi security forces in northern parts of Iraq.

The Swedish force will be under Swedish national command and control during the operation. Necessary coordination will take place within the international coalition against ISIL, primarily with other actors in the area of operations, including the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Finland.

The Swedish operation in northern Iraq is part of a larger picture. The international coalition is actively working against ISIL in several parts of Iraq, and the operation in northern Iraq is one part of this. Moreover, Sweden has long had a broad, long-term commitment to and involvement with Iraq. Our relations are very good and encompass cooperation in a range of areas based on large-scale international exchanges, mainly thanks to the substantial proportion of the Swedish population – close to two per cent – with roots in Iraq and the region. In addition, Sweden has engaged in close development cooperation with Iraq since 2004, focusing on democratic development, human rights, the situation of women and gender equality, anti-corruption and support to civil society.

ISIL's ravages are terrible. The violence and hatred appear limitless. Their objective is to inspire fear so that resistance gives way and violence can triumph. This must not be allowed to happen. That is why the efforts of the international coalition against ISIL are crucial. Cooperation against terrorism is the key to success. We, on Sweden's part, will continue to contribute to these common efforts.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Peter Hultqvist, Minister for Defence



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Swedish - South Africa links go back a long way

Published 08 April 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Pretoria News 8 april 2015 In connection to Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström's visit to South Africa (for the Nordic Africa Meeting of Foreign Ministers) she wrote an article describing the long term commitment and relationship between our two countries. The article also highlights some of the key issues that she will highlight during the meeting.

One of the proudest moments in modern Swedish history was when Nelson Mandela visited Sweden in 1990 – the first country outside of Africa – after his long imprisonment.

Sweden's relations with South Africa are unique. As far back as the 1960s, a country-wide Swedish anti-apartheid movement arose. In the early 1970s, we were the only western country to give official political support to the anti-apartheid movement, as well as massive financial support.

The victory for democracy in South Africa and the election of Nelson Mandela as President was an extraordinarily positive event for us Swedes as well. Since then, the relationship between our countries has evolved and we cooperate on a range of issues, not least trade and investments.

For these reasons, I am very happy to be here in South Africa today – the first minister from the new Social Democrat-led Swedish Government – for bilateral meetings and to participate in the Nordic-African Foreign Ministers Meeting. I am looking forward to discussions on issues of mutual concern. Below are four of the issues I will highlight:

Peace and security

Standing up to security threats is a joint responsibility and one in which the value of solidarity comes through. I commend South African efforts to help address conflicts on the continent. South Africa's contribution to the UN force in the DRC is a case in point.

Threats like this must always be met with determination. Sweden remains committed to supporting African efforts at regional peacekeeping. Furthermore, to promote long-term stability and sustainable development in Africa, Sweden remains engaged in substantial development cooperation in the region, while simultaneously making great efforts to increase trade.

In Sweden's neighbourhood, too, new threats have emerged. In Ukraine, we have seen Russia illegally annex the Crimean Peninsula. We have seen the terrible situation created by the escalation on the ground in eastern Ukraine, with no doubt that Russian-backed separatists are responsible. Since spring last year, more than 6 000 Ukrainians have been killed and one million people have been internally displaced. Once again, we must remind ourselves of the necessity of international security based on principles such as non-aggression, respect for international law and human rights, and the right to territorial integrity.

Jobs and growth

Swedish-South African cooperation in trade and investments – for example in ICT and energy and mining equipment – is an important vehicle for future success for both of our countries. Jobs are in equal shares the foundation of human dignity and of economic growth. Some 18 000 South Africans are currently employed by Swedish companies.

This is a good foundation for developing trade and economic exchange between our countries, leading to sustainable job creation. For youth, especially, employment is crucial for empowerment and the ability to build a home and family. This is one of the most important challenges we have as politicians. Working together, we enhance the chances for dynamic development in which people from all backgrounds are given a chance to contribute to development, both with regard to their own lives and to society.

Peace in Israel and Palestine

One of the new Swedish Government's first decisions was to recognise Palestine as a sovereign state. The main reason was that the criteria of recognition were fulfilled. Through our decision, Sweden wants to give new dynamics to a halted peace process, facilitate a peace deal by making the parties less unequal and instil hope in young Palestinians and Israelis that peaceful co-existence is possible.

The goal is to make it possible for Israel and Palestine to live within reciprocally acknowledged borders, with the 1967 borders as the point of departure and where potential land swaps would require the agreement of both parties.

Human rights and gender equality

The principles of democracy rest on human rights; that all human beings have the same rights and freedoms. Democracy is never finalised and finished, but must constantly be developed and deepened in interaction between those of us elected by the people and the people who elected us. Permanent dialogue and contact with civil society organisations is a crucial tool. This is a task for all government representatives around the world; a task we must constantly remind ourselves of and work towards.

Human rights are also women's rights. Striving towards gender equality is not only a goal in itself, but also a precondition for achieving our wider foreign and security policy objectives. In this context, I warmly support the prominent role South Africa has played in promoting the role of women within the framework of the African Union. The AU Summit decision to designate 2015 as the year for the empowerment of women is a much-needed initiative.

South Africa has a special place in Swedish history and political life. I am looking forward to these days in your country to listen, exchange ideas and participate in our common task of supporting peace, security and justice.



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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

Plugging Government into Peace

Published 23 March 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Building Peace 23 mars 2015

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are transforming relationships. Networks are rapidly replacing hierarchies; the power of actors to effect change increasingly depends on the number of connections they have rather than the name of their institution; and what we call “mass communication” can nowadays be sparked by a single individual. But modern forms of interaction made possible by ICTs, particularly social media, can also enable governments to engage directly with citizens in new ways. An important part of this dynamic is ensuring that relevant actors play a key role in conflict resolution and that women, in particular, are able to take part in emerging networks. To take full advantage of the technological revolution, governments need to find new ways to interact with the public.

When Sweden recognized Palestine as a state, the news spread quickly around the world—in part due to the strong opinions surrounding the topic. But an additional important explanation is the new social media system the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) has been developing to enhance its digital public diplomacy and the reach of news like this. Since 2013, most Swedish embassies have had a presence on Facebook and Twitter. Recently, the Swedish MFA launched a dedicated news portal, designed to increase discussion around Swedish foreign policy in social media by drawing on the expertise in the organization.

The process of enhancing the Ministry’s use of social media is part of a wider push that acknowledges a shift in citizen mobility and behavior. Hierarchies are giving way to networks of people who self-organize organically to collaborate and make their voices heard. New forms for engagement and innovation are emerging that draw on the opportunities that lie in new information technologies and leverage the power of networks to approach problem solving in new ways.

Although technology in itself is neutral and can be used for both good and evil, this positive potential must be duly recognized.

In conjunction with technological developments, security policy is expanding to encompass issues such as gender equality, climate change, migration, freedom of speech, and public health. The security of individuals and their right to freedom of association and expression are key issues for advocates of smart power.

People's everyday concerns are intrinsically linked in a fine web of relations and interactions, whose exponential growth is often driven by technological development. One case in point, where Sweden is using ICTs to empower women and girls in new ways, is the work of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to increase socio-economic equality between women and men by ensuring equal access to technology.

At its best, technology helps create social development and real, people-to-people communication across borders and conflict lines. It can generate a global sense of community in which people can find common ground. At its worst, virtual communications can be misused to spread propaganda and hatred, and fuel conflict. Conflict thrives where there is a lack of understanding and where access to information varies.

As a result, technology's potential, for good and bad is expansive and needs to be explored thoroughly. Although technology in itself is neutral and can be used for both good and evil, its positive potential must be duly recognized. This is why the Swedish MFA takes learning and engagement in this new environment seriously: in order to understand and inform the new landscape, we need to be part of it.

To respond to this new reality, the Swedish MFA is increasingly engaging directly with global audiences, an initiative which has raised new questions regarding the way the organization interacts with the public. There is a growing need for an agile capacity for collaboration with emerging actors, and we need to do things differently if we want to make an impact. In the past, it often sufficed for foreign ministries to deliver official messages of their governments' policies, but today their role is much more dynamic—as partners and nodes in the exchange processes, both listening and expressing their views with a genuine curiosity about important issues and the countries they engage with.

In keeping with the modern transformation of this role, the Swedish MFA is

actively exploring novel forms of engagement that tap into the field of digital innovation. These initiatives include the Stockholm Initiative for Digital Diplomacy (SIDD), a co-creative event bringing together various actors from the field of digital diplomacy for a workshop on the future of diplomacy in a connected world.

The first SIDD event took place in 2014 in Stockholm and gathered digital diplomats from all over the world. The second edition is a multifaceted campaign combining digital content with convenings at multiple locations across the globe. The campaign, Midwives4all focuses on women's rights to safe motherhood and the importance of midwifery to health and development. According to a recent United Nations (UN) study, well-trained midwives can prevent two-thirds of deaths among women and newborns, illustrating that midwives should be recognized as heroes. This is an urgent matter and I will personally take part in the campaign to highlight the importance of investing in midwifery services globally.

In collaboration with the Dutch Embassy in London, Sweden has also developed the Diplohack concept, an experimental platform for combining the specific skill sets of diplomats, social entrepreneurs, tech developers and designers, journalists, academics, NGOs, and businesses to 'hack' traditional diplomatic problems in start-up style groups.

Although these small innovation hubs function as laboratories, they also represent a genuine intention to stay informed about technological developments. This intention reinforces a foreign policy based on Sweden's priorities for a safer world: to build our security in solidarity with others, our top priorities are: a feminist foreign policy empowering women, an active UN policy, disarmament, and sustainable development. Our experience is that constant change is the new norm. Those who are innovative and take initiative, however modest, will be able to promote positive development. We therefore need to be explorers and adapt to new circumstances as we aim for our policy objectives.

Importantly, technology is now making information flow from places that previously were blank spots on the mental map of policymakers. We can no longer say "we did not know," when images and videos of conflict and human rights violations recorded on smartphones and distributed over the Internet, are reaching us from the most remote places in the world.

Big data has opened new pathways to development and conflict resolution. The information technology revolution sweeping across the globe is also

opening the way for many socially beneficial applications of technology. By analyzing mobile money transactions (while keeping them anonymous), the United Nations Global Pulse, a flagship initiative on the use of big data, has been able to demonstrate the feasibility of creating early-warning systems for food security. Flowminder, a Swedish foundation, combines anonymized mobile phone data with traditional surveys to solve public health problems, such as mapping the spread of Ebola. A further example is that through careful and real-time analysis of social media, it is now possible to quickly pinpoint ceasefire violations.

The positive effects of technology, the Internet and big data for development must not be overlooked in discussions of issues of surveillance and privacy now taking place at the UN and elsewhere. The use of big data will be crucial to ensuring that we know what is happening, not least in relation to the new sustainable development goals currently under negotiation at the UN.

It is safe to say that policymakers and diplomats—just like most of us—have not yet fully grasped the consequences of the mobile revolution as it comes to unfold, a key vehicle for interconnectedness and the foundation of the global village. With all the data in the world accessible via smartphones in our pockets, government still needs to figure out how to close the gap between analysis and action. The distance between organizations working in the field and decision-making at the political level is too great. While previously, we were unable to take action because we did not know enough, today we are hampered by the huge volume of available information. As policymakers, we need better ways to distinguish signals from noise.

Technology in itself cannot resolve conflicts. But in a world where nearly everyone has—or will soon have—access to communication technologies, the question is whether we will be able to resolve conflicts without technology. It is sometimes argued that small-scale initiatives, such as those developed by the Swedish MFA or other stakeholders, are futile when it comes to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This view overlooks the importance of initiating positive processes in collaboration with other stakeholders. Progress will depend on our capacity to join forces with the people who are currently working to create a better future, and the times we live in suggest that technology will be at the heart of this work.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Midwives4All: Professionals Who Put Women First Have the Power to Change the Future

Published 08 March 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Huffington Post 8 mars 2015 Today, on International Women's Day, Sweden is speaking out in support of every woman's right to a midwife. The midwifery profession and workforce have the power to save thousands of lives each year.

They therefore deserve our full recognition and respect. High maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity, including devastating consequences such as stillbirth, need to be tackled urgently. In 2013 alone, an estimated 289,000 women died from complications related to pregnancy. Every year, nearly 3 million infants die in the first month of life and 2.6 million babies are stillborn.

The basic right to health and access to quality services for women and children is particularly important in crisis situations, including in conflict and post-conflict areas, and in regions affected by epidemics.

Last year, the Lancet published a series of articles on how scaling up the skilled midwifery workforce could prevent close to two-thirds of maternal and newborn deaths. The series was accompanied by a major report by UNFPA, WHO and the International Confederation of Midwives, outlining the state of midwifery in 73 countries. Together, they represent a significant effort to highlight the importance of midwifery in saving lives and empowering women.

Based on these reports, and Sweden's international engagement in improving

women's health, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs recently launched Midwives4All, an initiative to accelerate these efforts. We hope to spark engagement and more discussion on the benefits of investing in the midwifery workforce, while highlighting the benefits of evidence-based maternal health services.

Our aim is to strengthen women's rights, improve women's access to resources and increase women's representation. Midwives do not only improve the chance of a safe pregnancy and delivery; they provide the full continuum of care throughout a woman's life, and by doing so they play a key role in building sustainable societies. Yet, in many countries, this field of expertise is still not represented.

We are involving our embassies and the collaborative force of our networks to reach out in a connected world where citizens, organizations and decision-makers come together to take on urgent challenges. Using the best available data to inform our discussions, we will help to spread best practices that offer hope for women all over the world.

Why, you may ask. Because we are convinced it needs to be a top priority. Investing in midwifery is not only economically sound and life-saving. Midwifery transforms societies. It promotes women's human rights, women's health and gender equality as a whole.

In this way, Midwives4All is a part of the Swedish Government's ambition to pursue a feminist foreign policy, which aims to strengthen women's rights, improve women's access to resources and increase women's representation. This initiative will contribute in a very concrete way to these overriding objectives, and our ambition is to turn a piece of our own country's history into global progress.

In Sweden, midwives work alongside doctors and other health professionals and play a crucial role in health and welfare. This is one of the reasons Sweden invests in midwifery both nationally and internationally through Sida, our development agency. Sweden supports capacity building in countries ranging from Afghanistan, Zambia and Bangladesh to Somalia and Guatemala. Another reason is our commitment to human rights and equality as the basis for development.

As early as 1751, the Collegium Medicum reported to the Swedish Parliament that, "Of 651 cases of women who died in childbirth, 400 could have been saved if they had had adequate access to a midwife." At that time,

the maternal mortality rate in Sweden was almost 900 deaths per 100,000 live births. This is higher than in almost any country in the world today.

One century later, Sweden's maternal mortality rate had decreased to 230 due to the presence of midwives throughout the country trained in safe delivery practices, including infection prevention. Investment in midwives later became a natural part in building our welfare state, where maternal and child health services were provided free of charge, with delivery wards and women's clinics leading to further reductions in maternal mortality.

The evidence is already out there. #Midwives4All therefore aims to connect people, to break the barriers that prevent change and bring together citizens, NGOs, midwives, policymakers and doers. We are seizing the opportunities offered by newer information technologies.

Let us begin by recognizing the midwifery profession as the life-saver and agent of change that it is and can be. I hope that many of you today will be able to join the conversation and work with us on a shared vision -- midwives4all.



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

How UN peacekeeping operations can become more effective

Published 27 January 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Dagens Nyheter 27 januari 2015 The UN's peacekeeping operations are facing many challenges. Demand for UN missions is increasing. At the same time, the resources available are limited and must be managed prudently.

The nature of international conflict has changed over the past 25 years. Interstate armed conflicts have been largely replaced by intrastate conflicts, often in countries with weak government institutions and impaired capacity to protect their own populations. Today, 1.5 billion people live in fragile and conflict-affected countries or countries in which criminal violence is rife.

This places new demands on international crisis management and peacekeeping operations. What were largely military commitments in the past have become more complex, multidimensional UN missions involving military personnel, police and civilian functions acting side by side.

The UN, the EU and other regional actors must strengthen and adapt their peacekeeping instruments and capacities in order to handle current challenges. Following its failures in Rwanda and the Balkans in the mid-1990s, the UN implemented a comprehensive review of its peacekeeping operations. This resulted in a number of reforms, including the integration of civilian and military components in UN peace operations. Around the same time, the EU began developing its crisis management capacity which from the outset, at the initiative of Sweden and others, focused on civilian tools.

The UN has a central role to play in international crisis management, thanks to its legitimacy and widespread presence in the field. However, the global

organisation has limited resources at its disposal and a constant stream of new challenges to handle. It just doesn't add up.

The UN's peacekeeping operations are at a crossroads once again. In today's conflicts, it's more a matter of protecting civilians than monitoring ceasefires. New threats such as organised crime and terrorism also affect peacekeeping operations. The UN must sharpen its instruments once again. The UN Secretary-General therefore decided last year on a new review of UN peace operations. A high-level panel of experts has been appointed and is expected to submit a report later this spring.

Since 1996, Sweden has participated in the Challenges Forum, a unique international network of partner organisations. The Forum, which has representatives from six continents and 21 countries, helps to identify ways to meet the challenges facing international peace operations. The Folke Bernadotte Academy hosts the Challenges Forum International Secretariat.

In its latest report, the Challenges Forum presented 24 targeted recommendations on how to further develop UN peace operations. On behalf of all the partner organisations, we will today (27 January) hand over the report to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the UN Headquarters in New York. This handover takes place at a strategic time, as the report will be able to contribute to the UN's own review of its peacekeeping operations.

The report's recommendations include the following:

- That the UN must strengthen its capacity to identify and develop strategies to meet new transnational threats, such as terrorism and organised crime.
- That UN peace operations should use new technology to strengthen its capacity to obtain intelligence, and that Member States should make the necessary resources available to the UN to make this possible.
- That cooperation between the UN and regional organisations engaged in peace operations must be strengthened and streamlined.
- That integrated guidelines for implementing strategies in peace operations should be drafted, on gender equality issues for example.

Sweden wants to contribute actively to the UN's capacity to handle international conflicts in various ways. Therefore, Sweden is now strengthening its commitment to the UN within the areas of peace and security, sustainability, equality and gender equality. We are doing this by

pursuing important normative issues and by making concrete contributions to UN operations.

We are doing this by providing Swedish troops, police officers and civilian personnel to international peace operations. The most recent example is Sweden's current stationing of military personnel to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

We are doing this by pursuing the issue of ending sexual violence in conflict. This has been going on for centuries, but until now the issue and its victims have been silenced. It is only now, with the systematic collection of information and data on sexual violence, that we have understood the enormous breadth of these crimes – that principally target women and girls.

We are doing this by actively working to strengthen women's active engagement and participation in issues concerning peace and security. Sustainable peace can only be achieved if all competence is utilised. Women must be involved, both around the negotiating table and in the reconstruction of the country when the conflict has ended.

Sweden's various contributions to the UN's peacekeeping operations and its candidacy for the Security Council 2017–2018 are central expressions of the country's strengthened commitment to the UN. Sweden wants to take responsibility and actively participate in ensuring that the UN is better equipped to handle today's global challenges.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Sven-Eric Söder, Director-General, Folke Bernadotte Academy



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Social dimension of the EU must be strengthened

Published 31 December 2014 Updated 17 May 2015

Expressen, Hufvudstadsbladet 31 december 2014
Tomorrow it will be 20 years since Sweden and Finland together joined the European Union. Despite the challenges we have faced in connection with the economic crisis, this was a wise decision and the practical benefits of membership are well known. Today, Swedes and Finns can live, travel, study, work and retire wherever they like in the EU. The common market creates jobs and gives us an increased supply of goods at better prices. It will be further broadened by a digital internal market.

As a new year dawns, and in the light of global uncertainty, we would like to emphasise what the development of the EU has meant for prosperity and security in eastern Europe. Since we joined, the EU has been further enlarged by the accession of 13 countries in eastern and central Europe. Our countries played a key role in this process, particularly by supporting the progress of the Baltic countries towards membership.

The enlargement of the EU has proved to be the most important approach to peace, sustainable growth and prosperity in Europe – as recognised by the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU. The EU has become the world's largest integrated economy, with a population of more than 500 million. The EU economy has overtaken the US economy and accounts for almost a third of world trade. This development entails obligations.

The EU should continue along its chosen path and we see several areas in which Sweden and Finland will act together and continue to drive further development.

Enlargement: Turkey and the countries of the Western Balkans, which just 20 years ago were at war, have chosen the path towards modernisation and membership. That path must continue by way of reforms and fair conditions for all. We will work to ensure that the EU stands by its commitments to these countries.

Neighbourhood: we will actively participate in joint EU efforts to promote a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Ukraine. The EU must take a clear stand in support of the right of all neighbouring countries to make sovereign decisions and choose their own future, including concrete support and countermeasures when this right is called into question. We want stable and prosperous neighbours free of conflicts with other neighbours.

In addition, the EU must equip itself better to meet the challenges in the countries to the east and south. Tunisia, which has succeeded in consolidating its democratic development in a demanding environment, is an example of a country that deserves the full support of the EU.

Crisis management: our countries took the initiative for EU civilian crisis management and are leading contributors to EU civilian missions. We have been involved in all the EU's military and civilian missions, since we see the EU as a crucial actor for peace and security. We must continue to develop the EU's capability in this area.

Trade: a trade agreement with the United States will offer the EU a new opportunity to create sustainable growth and more jobs – but the agreement must also be a model for others in terms of trade, product safety, environmental protection and workers' rights, with transparent investment rules that respect every country's own objectives. It must build on democratic political decisions.

The EU is also facing serious challenges. Priority has been given to deregulation and creating common markets rather than to building a social Europe with cross-border democracy. Today there are almost 25 million unemployed in the EU. Citizens' rights in the labour market are under great pressure.

Consequently, the EU's social dimension, as well as its democratic

legitimacy, must be strengthened. The EU should focus on issues where the Union provides added value and makes a real difference to the individual citizen. This will also strengthen the EU's legitimacy and put it in a better position to respond to populism and xenophobia.

The first 20 years are already history. In a serious global situation, we share the same ambition: as the balance of economic and political power changes in the world, the EU must develop as a global actor for peace, security, sustainability and equality.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sweden
Erkki Tuomioja, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Finland



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

All nuclear weapons must be abolished

Published 08 December 2014 Updated 17 May 2015

Svenska Dagbladet Brännpunkt 8 december 2014

Today the third international conference on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons starts in Vienna. A large delegation from the Government Offices and the Riksdag will be there to represent Sweden.

- In these unsettled times it is tremendously important to act vigorously to promote disarmament.
- The Government is now strengthening disarmament efforts across a broad front.
- Our line is clear: all nuclear weapons must be abolished.

A nuclear weapon explosion would have appalling humanitarian consequences. Next year, 70 years will have passed since a single nuclear weapon killed 90 000 people in Hiroshima and levelled the city with the ground. Humanity must never forget this. The 2 000 nuclear tests that have taken place around the world have poisoned land and water for many years to come.

Last week one of the survivors of Hiroshima, Setsuko Thurlow, visited the Riksdag. She bore witness to the horrors of nuclear weapons. And she described the after-effects that she and tens of thousands of others have to live with – for generations. She has made it her life's work to spread the message: this must never happen again.

It is therefore welcome that more than 150 countries have now endorsed the international initiative focusing specially on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

One of my first decisions as Minister for Foreign Affairs was that Sweden

would also join the initiative. The reason was simple: nuclear weapons must never be used again. The Government of Fredrik Reinfeldt put Sweden among the spectators and was unwilling to participate in these concrete efforts against nuclear weapons. I found this line strange. We must work intensively towards this end, in new forums as well. I take this extremely seriously, as does the Swedish Government.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is the cornerstone in anti-nuclear weapon efforts to prevent proliferation and achieve disarmament. Next year's Review Conference will be important and must address the challenges we are facing. More than 16 000 nuclear weapons remain to be decommissioned. That being so, it is particularly worrying that States are modernising their nuclear weapons.

It is high time to heed President Obama's call in Prague and Berlin to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in defence doctrines and negotiate significant reductions in nuclear weapons arsenals. I call on Russia to move forward on this together with the United States. We are particularly concerned about the presence in our vicinity of tactical 'battlefield' nuclear weapons and call on all States with such forces to withdraw and abolish them. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty must also be permitted to enter into force.

It is also important that North Korea dismantles its nuclear weapons programme and that a peaceful solution to the nuclear technology issue is reached with Iran. India, Israel and Pakistan, which have not yet acceded to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, are called upon to join the Treaty as non-nuclear weapon states and, until then, to live up to the principles of the Treaty.

Disarmament and non-proliferation are a consistent theme of Sweden's foreign policy and extend to other types of weapons as well. The use of chemical weapons struck indiscriminately against civilians in Syria last year and regrettably has been continued this year by a number of chlorine attacks. This must end. It is also important to make biological substances secure so as to prevent their use as weapons. Small and light weapons threaten and harm people every day. The UN Arms Trade Treaty can help to control illegal trade. The Government is now moving to raise Sweden's disarmament profile in a number of areas.

In the times we live in, it must be strongly emphasised that it would be horrific if decisions of life and death were delegated to machines. Continued

discussions on autonomous weapons systems are therefore necessary. These should be held within the framework of the international convention prohibiting or regulating conventional weapons that have serious humanitarian consequences.

Setsuko Thurlow talked about the great concern that she and other Hiroshima survivors feel: how the bomb – even today, nearly 70 years later – affects her children and grandchildren, future great-grandchildren and their children. It is the responsibility of humanity to ensure that the world gets rid of these diabolical weapons.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sweden's commitment to Ukraine deepens

Published 26 November 2014 Updated 17 May 2015

Ukrainska Pravda 26 november 2014

Today I am making my first visit to Ukraine as Minister for Foreign Affairs. Today the Riksdag is also ratifying the uniquely comprehensive EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. These two events send a clear message: Sweden's commitment to Ukraine continues and is being deepened.

The Government's position on Ukraine enjoys firm support in the Riksdag and Swedish public opinion. Sweden has always stood up for an open Europe. We uphold Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union regarding the conditions for EU membership. Since our own accession to the EU, we have been active in advancing EU enlargement policy and efforts to become integrated with countries in eastern Europe, through the Eastern Partnership, for example. Ukraine is an important country in this regard.

The Government's policies follow three parallel tracks: coordinated measures by the EU against Russia's aggression, support for Ukraine's reform agenda and long-term efforts for peaceful development in our part of the world.

For the Swedish Government, it goes without saying that we must continue to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This support rests on the principles of international law, and thus the Ukrainian people's natural right to make their own decisions on the future of their country. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and its military aggression in eastern Ukraine are in breach of international law. I would like to emphasise the gravity of the fact that these breaches of the principles of our world order have been committed by a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which has a special responsibility for peace and security.

Sweden's voice will be strong and clear in support of Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia we have agreed in the EU. The destabilisation of Ukraine must cease, and the Minsk Protocol must be respected. EU Member States decided as recently as last week to extend the list of people subjected to EU travel restrictions and the freezing of funds. EU Member States also agreed to consider additional new sanction areas if the situation so requires.

The outcome of the Ukrainian parliamentary elections in October confirmed the desire for reforms. We would like to see progress towards a stable democracy governed by the rule of law, an open economy and increasing prosperity and security for all citizens, and greater respect for fundamental human rights. Strengthening our economic ties and identifying necessary reforms to ensure continued EU integration will support Ukraine in its transition to a functioning market economy based on the rule of law. The Riksdag's ratification of the Association Agreement is an expression of Sweden's long-term support and our desire to deepen relations with Ukraine in all areas.

EU integration, however, requires broad-based and radical reforms. This means reforms to ensure an independent and effective rule of law, and decentralisation to bring public power closer to the people. This means transparency in public administration, combating corruption and increasing gender equality.

The difficulties must in no way be underestimated. Years of misrule have left deep wounds. As has Russian aggression. But a better future is possible – if everyone takes their responsibility: political leaders, who must not be allowed to repeat the mistake of the 2004 Orange Revolution, when personal ambitions eclipsed national interests; civil society and Ukrainian citizens, whose strength is needed to advance change; and the rest of the world. Sweden will do what it can.

Alongside our efforts in the EU, we will continue our extensive bilateral development assistance of more than SEK 200 million per year. We are helping to strengthen democracy and contributing support to concrete projects to strengthen protection of human rights, rule of law and anti-corruption measures. We are supporting institutional reforms and a continued strong role for civil society in reform efforts. We are among the leading foreign partners when it comes to energy-efficiency measures that can make Ukraine less dependent on foreign gas. We are also contributing humanitarian support as winter approaches, including SEK 35 million to various international actors to help the people in eastern Ukraine who have

been hardest hit by the conflict.

Just as Ukraine needs a long-term strategy for its development, we need to work together with a long-term view to create conditions for easing tensions and promoting peaceful development in our part of the world. This must take place step by step and methodically, through candid dialogue based on the principles of international law. This is a difficult but necessary challenge. A united EU and coherent action with our partners, rooted in our common basic values, are of decisive importance if we are to succeed in achieving mutual security in a new era.

The challenges for Ukraine today are enormous. But we have also seen the power and determination displayed at Maidan, when hundreds of thousands of people braved the cold of winter in Kiev to demonstrate against misrule. Demands – which inspire hope that a better future is possible.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The Government will decide today to recognise the State of Palestine

Published 30 October 2014 Updated 17 May 2015

DN Debatt 30 oktober 2014

The Government will decide today to recognise the State of Palestine. This is an important step that confirms the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

Sweden's traditionally close ties with the State of Israel are now complemented by an equivalent relationship with the other party in the two-state solution that Israelis, Palestinians and a united international community see as the path to lasting peace in the Middle East.

Our decision comes at a critical time. Over the last year, we have seen how the peace talks have again stalled, how new settlement decisions on occupied Palestinian land have hampered a two-state solution and how violence returned to Gaza. Today's recognition is a contribution to a better future for a region that for far too long has been marked by frozen negotiations, destruction and frustration.

By recognising the State of Palestine, we want first of all to lend our support to the moderate Palestinian forces – those who will manage the complex Palestinian state-building process and those who will soon again have to sit at the negotiating table.

Secondly, we want to facilitate an agreement by making the parties in these negotiations less unequal. The objective is to enable Israel and Palestine to live within mutually recognised borders, with the 1967 borders as the basis and Jerusalem as the capital of two states, and where any land swaps will only be accepted if negotiated by the parties.

And thirdly, we hope to contribute to more hope and optimism among the

young Palestinians and Israelis who might otherwise risk being radicalised in the belief that there is no alternative to violence and the status quo. We want our recognition to say the same thing to the six-year-old child in Gaza who has already experienced three wars as to six-year-olds in Israel: we still believe in a peace agreement based on the State of Israel living side by side in peace and security with a democratic, cohesive and viable Palestinian state.

The Government considers that the international law criteria for the recognition of the State of Palestine have been satisfied.

There is a territory, albeit with non-defined borders. There is also a population. And there is a government with the capacity for internal and external control.

In addition, the international community has deemed Palestine to be well positioned for the establishment of a state; in other words, it has the capacity to assume the obligations of a state.

It is true that the Palestinian Authority does not have full control over Palestine, neither in the West Bank nor in Gaza. As far as Gaza is concerned, following the formation of Palestinian technocratic unity government and the reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah, the capacity for internal cohesion has been enhanced. Not to recognise Palestine because of the Israeli occupation would be contrary to the international law principle of 'no fruits of aggression'.

The Government's assessment that the international law criteria have been fulfilled is shared by international law experts, including Professor Ove Bring, Professor Said Mahmoudi and Professor Pål Wrange, who recently wrote an opinion piece on this subject in *Dagens Nyheter* (20 October).

Sweden has previously recognised states – Croatia in 1992 and Kosovo in 2008 – even though they lacked effective control over parts of their territory. Palestine is similarly a special case. Now as then, there are strong political arguments for why recognition – a decision regarding Palestine already taken by more than 130 states – is the right way to go.

In 2009 EU Member States reiterated their readiness to recognise a Palestinian State, when appropriate. We are now ready to lead the way. In view of the difficult situation in the region and in light of the international law analysis, the Government sees no reason to further delay a Swedish

decision. We hope that this may show others the way forward.

Sweden's recognition of the State of Palestine will be followed by enhanced efforts to support the development of democracy and human rights in Palestine. Recognition also entails greater responsibility. We will make clear demands on Palestine, just as we do on Israel. These will include fighting corruption, respecting civil and political rights and increasing the influence of women. Obviously, this also means a complete renunciation of violence.

There are those who will argue that today's decision is premature. If anything, I fear it is too late. The Government will now, together with the other EU countries, the United States and other regional and international actors, work to support renewed negotiations on a final status settlement. Such a settlement must be negotiated in accordance with the principles of international law and guarantee both the Palestinians' and Israelis' legitimate demands for national self-determination and security.

Israel and Palestine are already living side by side. The goal is to be able to do so in peaceful coexistence with secure and recognised borders. The purpose of Sweden's recognition is to contribute to such a future.

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs



Opinion piece from Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Convention on the Rights of the Child to become law

Published 20 October 2014 Updated 17 May 2015

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.