

Statement of Government Policy presented by the Prime Minister, Mr Göran Persson, to the Swedish Riksdag on Tuesday, 13 September 2005

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Mr Speaker,
Honourable Members of the Riksdag,

Sweden is a good country, a country to be proud of.

Foreign commentators see in Sweden a country that is standing up well in a situation of global competition, a country that is coping with the adjustment in a new time, a country where optimism and faith in the future are justified.

Growth, research, sustainable development, gender equality, living standard, employment, childcare – in area after area Sweden holds leading positions.

I see the same picture all over Sweden.

Last week, when I talked to ninety-year-old Göran Karlsson at Dundret sheltered housing in Jönköping I was seeing what is perhaps one of the biggest triumphs of our time: we are living healthier and longer lives in Sweden.

At Bollsta Sawmill I see how advanced technology and a high degree of specialisation have changed jobs and what used to be a heavy and dangerous industrial environment. In Gällivare I meet enthusiastic entrepreneurs in a community where trends have been reversed and a new belief in the future is growing. At our universities and higher education institutions I see how Sweden as a knowledge society is making its mark on new generations, new regions and new social groups.

The adjustment is rapid – and difficult.
It is particularly evident in the labour market.

In our country 263,451 people are openly unemployed;
36 904 people have been out of work for more than two years.

Unemployment is destructive.

So let me be clear about this:

Structural change in the labour market is going to continue. More people will have to go from one job to another. This transition must become easier for people – not more difficult.

During the next parliamentary term, a Social Democratic government will substantially improve unemployment insurance. Collective agreements will be upheld. Labour law will be developed.

Now investments are increasing sharply. Companies are expanding their production capacity. Inflation and interest rates are at record low levels. Real wage increases are good. Both households and businesses have increasing faith in the future. Private consumption is growing substantially. The surplus target remains in place and the expenditure ceiling is being met.

Our common resources are also growing.

This position of strength will be used.

It will be used to defeat unemployment and exclusion – not for big tax cuts.

It will be used to increase security – not to reduce it.

A broad employment package will be implemented.

100 000 single entrepreneurs will be given the opportunity to hire their first employee due to reduced social insurance contributions.

7 500 unemployed graduates will be given the opportunity of a job or a work placement in central government or small businesses.

13 000 work experience places and 3 000 trainee places will be provided for young unemployed people.

10 000 educational-leave replacement positions will be established in health and social care.
20 000 targeted “bonus jobs” for people who have been unemployed for more than 24 months will be established to raise quality in the public sector.
17 500 new places will be provided in higher education.
1 000 more people will be given places in advanced vocational training schemes.

The goal of policy is full employment.

In 2006 we will achieve the target of four per cent open unemployment.

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Everyone who wants to and can work should be able to get a job.

Ill health is decreasing. Thirty-five thousand fewer people are on sick leave than a year ago. The target of halving absence due to sick leave by 2008 can be achieved.

Preventive action and occupational health services will be improved. Study opportunities for people on sick leave and disability pensions will increase. A new pilot project will be launched to help people on long-term sick leave to return to work. On 1 July sickness insurance will be improved.

More job opportunities with increased quality will be provided for people with occupational disabilities. Wage subsidy will be increased further. Work on disability policy will be strengthened and coordinated.

Since 1994 employment among people born abroad has increased and unemployment has decreased. Introduction programmes and language studies will be adapted even more closely to individual needs. The workplace induction scheme will continue. The appropriation of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination will be increased. More action will be taken to increase ethnic diversity in central government administration. The objectives, direction and organisation of integration policy will be reviewed.

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Last year some 40 000 new businesses were started in Sweden. New business starts have not been as high for the past twenty years.

Industrial development centres will be given additional resources. Small businesses will be given better opportunities for investing in research and development. Work on simpler regulation will continue. Exports will be promoted. A long-term programme of action for the sectors of Swedish industry expected to be of strategic importance in the future will be carried out together with business and trade union organisations.

The carbon dioxide tax will be abolished for the part of industry that is covered by emissions trading and will be reduced for high-efficiency combined heat and power plants.

Flourishing regions will be developed throughout the country. In many places negative trends are now turning round, as in parts of Norrbotten where industry in general, the visitor sector, car testing activities and commerce are investing and hiring. The mining industry in Norrbotten is expanding rapidly. The Government intends to support Kiruna and Gällivare Municipalities in this development.

The Norway-Vänern Railway, the City Tunnel and the Haparanda Railway will be built. A government negotiator will be appointed to carry out a review, in cooperation with local and regional actors, of the conditions for possibly bringing forward railway construction on the Stockholm-Nyköping-Linköping line.

The Government's objective of 120 000 new dwellings in the present term of office will be exceeded. Record low interest rates are pushing down housing costs. Attention will be given to the housing situation of young people.

Sweden will be a darker place if forest is planted in pastures and meadows. More grazing animals and new crops will help to keep the landscape open. A new programme for rural development will be presented.

Small-scale food production will be facilitated. Ecological production of foodstuffs will increase. Requirements and supervision will be tightened throughout the food chain. Origin labelling will

be extended. The security of consumers will be increased and sustainable consumption will be given priority.

Sweden must have a responsible predatory animal policy that enjoys strong support throughout the population. Conflicts concerning predatory animal policy must decrease. Section 28 of the Game Ordinance will be made clearer.

Fisheries management and the monitoring of fishing activities will be improved. Animal protection will be enhanced.

Over the coming three years a total of SEK 450 million will be allocated to the replanting of forest that fell during the storm Gudrun in order to support the forest owners affected.

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A high level of knowledge is a clearer competitive advantage than ever before for the country. At the same time, nothing is more important for the development of the individual and the strength of democracy.

The same rules and objectives must apply to all schools. The value of educational alternatives must not be diminished by increased segregation and the impoverishment of municipal schools. Quality and equal standards must apply to schools.

School staff must have a clear responsibility and clear powers. Professional development for teachers will be reinforced. The initiative for 15 000 more staff in schools will be completed. Individual development plans will be introduced from year 1. The follow-up of schools must be improved. Therefore work will be started to hold national tests starting as early as year 3. Reading and mathematics will be reinforced. The influence and legal security of pupils will be increased. A special initiative will be taken for schools in segregated areas. A new Education Act will be presented. Discrimination and degrading treatment in schools will be prohibited.

A broad quality programme for upper secondary schools is being prepared. The individual programmes will be improved and reinforced with new resources.

Several new universities have been founded. Today, there is at least one higher education institution in each county. Skewed recruitment is falling sharply – in geographical, social and ethnic terms. This is good for regional development. The expansion of higher education will continue. The Government's objective is that fifty per cent of people born in any year will go on to higher education. Additional resources will be provided to assure quality.

Swedish research will be reinforced. Special investments will be made in medicine and technology. The target is for the public resources invested in research to reach one per cent of GDP per year.

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Women and men must have the same power to shape society and their own lives.

A gender-equal Sweden presupposes a gender-equal labour market. Employment protection for pregnant women and people on parental leave will be enhanced. Action will be presented to deal with gender discriminatory pay differences. The responsibility of the social partners will be emphasised. Legislation on the right to full-time work will be presented. An initiative will be taken to reduce ill health at workplaces where women preponderate. Measures will be designed to reduce the frequency of temporary employment and to increase the influence of employees in the public sector. Professional development in social and health care will be reinforced.

New national objectives will be set up for work on gender equality. Support to women's organisations will be enhanced. The National Centre for Battered and Raped Women will be made a national centre for knowledge on men's violence against women. Government support for women's shelters will be reinforced. New initiatives will be taken against sexual exploitation and trafficking in human beings. An offensive will be carried out to highlight gender equality issues in the EU. Women's rights and health will be given priority in development assistance.

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Our country is held up as the child-friendliest in the world. The corresponding assessment must apply to our senior citizens: Sweden is to be the best place in the world to grow old.

In Sweden an increasing number of people reach retirement age with the ability and will to continue working. Working life must be more flexible.

Half a million people in Sweden are over the age of eighty. Almost every third woman is able to celebrate her 90th birthday. We have a growing number of elderly people. Increasing age is also associated with illness.

All older people must have the right to high-quality care on equal terms. A national development plan for care of the elderly will be drawn up. The care of those suffering from several illnesses simultaneously is to be improved, as is dementia care. The needs of older immigrants must also be catered for. Support for relatives is to be improved. One hundred million kronor will be provided and cooperation with pensioners' organisations strengthened. Legislation and supervision are to be tightened up.

Many people working in elderly care have not benefited from skills development. The multi-year national campaign, Steps for Skills, is a long-term investment to increase the quality of elderly care.

Growing numbers of older people mean new housing requirements. As far as possible, people who want to should be able to continue living at home. This requires adaptation of existing housing. More types of housing must be developed so that freedom of choice and security can continue throughout life. Access to special sheltered housing for the elderly will be increased to meet growing needs. The housing supplement for pensioners will be reinforced. In its next term of office the Government wants to introduce a couples guarantee in elderly care, so that couples will not need to be separated in the event of illness.

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“Health is the individual’s most precious asset. He wants to safeguard it and regain it if lost. In this he needs the support of society.”

This is how Tage Erlander underlined the responsibility of society for health and social services in the mid-1950s, and I can also reaffirm the same commitment today.

On 1 November the national health care guarantee will be introduced for all treatments in health care and psychiatric care services.

New legislation on forms of operation for health care will ensure that all citizens are guaranteed a good standard of care on equal terms. Health care must be governed by need, not ability to pay. No publicly financed health care should give precedence to patients with private insurance or be run for private profit.

In order to raise quality and efficiency, highly specialised care provided on a national basis will be coordinated. It must be easier for patients to get in touch with their health centre and decide for themselves on the time for a return visit or operation. A new dental insurance scheme to augment preventive dental care and provide better protection against high costs is being prepared.

The trend has turned in the local government sector. An increasing number of municipalities have a budget in balance or in surplus. Sixty-five thousand more people are working in local government services such as health care, education and social services than in 1994. The number of employees in these activities is now as high as it was at the end of the 1980s.

It is important to enable municipalities and county councils to plan for the long term. For this reason they will be informed this autumn that the general state grants will be raised in both 2007 and 2008. There can be an increase in quality of care, education and social services and growth in the number of employees.

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Here are a few lines from Dan Andersson's well-known poem Geese Moving (Gässen flytta):

“Go and drink a breath of the autumn winds
look with me at the pale, blue sky!
Come and stand with me at the pasture gates
when the wild geese fly over the village!”

We are all strongly influenced by the natural setting and cultural environment in which we grew up and have lived our lives.

This is why we are frightened by climate change today. The mean temperature of the earth is rising, and it is rising most nearest to the poles. The Swedish landscape is under threat of more storms and floods and longer periods of drought.

The fight against environmental damage is put in a new light. The transformation of society to sustainable growth must be accelerated.

This readjustment holds enormous potential for technical development, research and innovation, for growth and new jobs in Sweden – but also opportunities to contribute to global justice.

Sweden is one of the few countries that have succeeded in reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. This development will be speeded up by an active policy. The green tax shift will continue.

Our environmental technology industry is a leader, generating jobs and export income. More and more people are replacing their heating systems. The demand for ethanol cars and hybrid cars is increasing. There is potential for a break in the trend.

A new goal will be set: creation of the conditions necessary to end Sweden's dependence on fossil fuels by 2020.

The use of electricity from renewable energy sources must increase by 15 TWh in the next ten years. The climate investment programmes will continue. Wind power will be extended.

Production of renewable energy by the forestry and agriculture sectors must increase. The position of electricity consumers and energy purchasers will be strengthened.

Special support will be introduced so as to enable a changeover to sustainable heating alternatives for the 145 000 one- and two-family homes and 105 000 flats whose only form of heating is oil. Households with direct use of electricity in residential heating will be offered a special RMI (repairs, maintenance and improvement) tax deduction to change over to other forms of heating.

A national programme for energy efficiency and low-energy construction will be presented. Exports of environmental technology will be subsidised. Appropriations for energy research will be increased.

The readjustment of the transport sector requires both international and national efforts and broad contributions by researchers, industry, users and the state. Taxation on car benefits will be reduced for gas-powered cars. At least 35 per cent of the cars purchased or leased by central government agencies must be environmental cars.

Sweden will achieve its ambitious climate objective. A new climate bill will be presented.

The marine environment must be improved. The work of having the Baltic Sea recognised as a particularly sensitive sea area is entering its final phase. The Baltic countries will be invited to a high-level meeting on the environmental problems of the Baltic Sea. Research and environmental monitoring will be developed. An international research centre for the marine environment is being planned.

A plan of action for our marine environments will be prepared. Eighteen new marine reserves will be set up over the next five years. The Government will host the Sixth North Sea Conference in Göteborg.

The Government is working for a strict chemicals policy in the EU, and for a decision on a global chemicals strategy at the UN meeting in Dubai next year. Sweden will take the lead in phasing out the most dangerous brominated flame retardants.

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The Swedish welfare model is successful, but still far from completion.

Nine months ago an initiative to employ 6 000 more staff in pre-schools was adopted.

Eight months ago housing supplements for pensioners were improved.

Two months ago support for the employment of people with occupational disabilities and people in sheltered employment was increased.

In one month's time the child allowance and the supplementary allowance for additional children will be increased by SEK 100, and supplementary allowance will be extended to start from the second child.

In four months' time maintenance support will be increased, housing allowance for families with children will be reinforced and a child supplement will be introduced for students.

In ten months' time 1.4 million employees will have better sickness insurance and almost 300 000 parents will receive higher compensation from parental insurance.

A continuous process of reform is needed to maintain welfare provision in a changing world. A progressive policy is needed to build bridges from the old to the new.

Reform by reform, step by step, welfare provision can be made stronger and better in a new time.

In just the same way it can be dismantled, step by step, reform by reform.

It is political will that is decisive.

Welfare is a contract between people, a compact on both rights and obligations, a promise to work, to take responsibility and to show consideration for one another.

Ultimately it is a practical expression of solidarity and the equal worth of every individual.

The Swedish welfare model will remain in existence for as long as you and I, and everyone else, is prepared to sustain and defend it.

It is the Government's conviction that the challenges of a new time are best met through security, equality and cohesion.

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Mr Speaker,

The Government provides funding to enable a total of 1.5 million people to participate in 15 million hours of learning in nine adult education associations. It provides funding to enable 100 000 students to take part each term in long and short courses at the country's 148 folk high schools.

Just think about the force in all these meetings between people, in all this exchange of experience, in all this search for knowledge. Just think what a force adult education represents for our knowledge society. Just think what a force for our democracy.

Adult education will be reinforced – not trimmed back.

Additional action is needed to promote reading, not least among young people. The publishing subsidy will be increased and the National Council for Cultural Affairs will be commissioned to initiate publication of classic works.

The commitment to children's culture will continue. The Year of Multiculture in 2006 will be followed by a Children's Culture Year in 2007.

A new film agreement will establish the conditions for a new strong five-year period for Swedish film production. The Theatre Alliance, free dramatic art and dance will be given increased support. The issue of pensions for cultural workers will be resolved. The state museum collections will be restored and conserved.

Sweden needs a proper meeting point for form and design. The conditions for a new design museum will be clarified. Preparations will be made for an expansion of the National Museum of Fine Arts. An architectural competition will be announced. The Government will actively support the establishment of a new Nobel museum.

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For decades Sweden has been an advocate of international law, disarmament and equality.

Tomorrow the UN Summit on reform and development will start in New York.

Dag Hammarskjöld's words on the UN and our joint responsibility challenge us:

“Future generations may come to say of us that we never achieved what we set out to do. May they never be entitled to say that we failed because we lacked faith or permitted narrow self-interest to distort our efforts.”

The UN will be strengthened. The composition of the United Nations Security Council must be modernised. The UN Millennium Development Goal for reducing poverty must be achieved. A peacebuilding commission to help conflict-affected countries and a council for human rights must be established. Disarmament and non-proliferation efforts must be intensified.

Climate change demands vigorous measures. The Government wants to see negotiations on specific emission limitations after 2012 start immediately. Significantly more countries than those that approved the Kyoto Agreement must take part. A network of environment ministers will be created to make emissions trading global.

Eastern policy must be more active. We want to see a coherent EU policy towards Russia. The EU needs to actively support democratic development in Belarus. Cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia will be intensified. Moldova will be given support in the fight against HIV/AIDS and human trafficking. A special envoy for the southern Caucasus countries will be appointed.

Peace efforts in the Middle East must increase. The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and partial withdrawal from the West Bank must be a first step towards two states within secure and

recognised borders as envisaged in the road map. The Government wants to see steps taken to create the conditions to enable Gaza to become economically viable after the withdrawal.

The Horn of Africa needs the world's support. The genocide in Darfur, the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the situation in Somalia – these circumstances all hinder the development of an afflicted area. Conflicts in the area must be resolved if increased development assistance is to have a meaningful impact. A national coordinator for Sweden's missions in the Horn of Africa will be appointed.

Peaceful development on the Korean Peninsula must be safeguarded. The tense situation poses a risk to security and stability in East Asia. An emissary will be appointed to coordinate Sweden's efforts to support the six-party talks. High-level political contact will continue.

The one per cent target for development assistance will be met. Special investments will be made in environmental measures and the fight against communicable diseases. Trade must be free and fair. Trade-related development assistance will be increased by thirty per cent.

The world's countries have a joint responsibility for people who are forced to flee. Sweden's support to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will increase. Sweden is working for a common EU refugee policy based on solidarity. Protection of children who come to Sweden alone and seek asylum will be strengthened.

The European Union will remain our most important forum for cooperation on our continent. Following the referendums on the new treaty, the Union must now be shaped so as to meet the demands of a new era. The period of reflection will be used for discussions on the EU's future and the European social model. The Government wants to see a fairer and more modern long-term EU budget. EU enlargement must continue. All European countries that meet the requirements must in time be able to become members, not least the countries in the Balkans. Turkey should be allowed to initiate membership talks as planned.

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The Swedish policy of non-participation in military alliances has broad popular support. With this policy as its basis, the defence reform will continue. Sweden will have a modern and capable

operational defence. The Nordic rapid response forces under Swedish leadership will make an important contribution to efforts to ensure peace and security. Sweden's commitment to maintaining peace in Afghanistan will be strengthened. The civilian crisis management mission in Aceh province, Indonesia, will continue.

A programme will be presented to increase national security, combat terrorism more effectively and make our society less vulnerable in the event of emergency situations. A more cohesive organisation will be proposed, as well as increased use of certain coercive measures to anticipate terrorist acts and improved coordination of intelligence agencies. Military personnel must be able to operate under police command and provide assistance in the event of a serious threat to our society.

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More crimes must be solved. The number of police officers will increase. Police tools will be strengthened. Bugging will be allowed. DNA records will be expanded. The number of institutional care places will increase. New prison and probation service legislation will be introduced. Protection for women exposed to violence will be developed. The possibility of using technological means to prevent men from violating restraining orders will be reviewed. Special attention will be directed at young people who commit crimes.

Social factors lie behind criminality. Care of misusers will be strengthened and preventive measures in socially deprived areas will be given special support. A well-developed welfare policy is the most effective way of curbing criminality.

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Mr Speaker,

The Social Democratic Government has governed Sweden since 1994. We have done so with an open mind and with our sights on the future. We have done so on a firm ideological basis. This is how we want to continue to govern:

When international competition leads to people losing their jobs, the Government increases support in the transition to a new job and better unemployment benefits – we do not destroy employees' security.

When the demand for knowledge puts added pressure on everyone to keep up, the Government raises the ambitions for schools and establishes new objectives for institutions of higher education and research – we do not believe that elitism makes knowledge grow and spread to others.

When the number of pensioners in our population is on the rise, the Government creates favourable conditions to help municipalities deal with the welfare system's next major challenge: expanding elderly care services to meet the new needs of a growing proportion of elderly people.

When globalisation creates new prosperity and at the same time widens the gaps, the Government raises its voice for justice, integration and the equal worth of all people – not only on paper but in the UN, the WTO, the EU, through Sida and in other international contexts.

When threats to the climate and the environment become increasingly apparent, the Government chooses a tougher environmental policy, more research and greater investments in new technology – not lower ambitions.

When globalisation impacts on people's everyday lives, the Government strengthens the Swedish welfare model – we do not replace it.

When Sweden faces the challenges of the future – then everyone must be included, not only some.

This is how a good country can be even better – worthy to be proud of.