



Speech from Ministry of Education and Research

Speech by Gustav Fridolin at Peer Learning Activity

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It is my great honor to welcome you to Sweden and this Peer Learning Activity that is a follow-up on the discussions on the challenges to the educational systems held during the EYCS Council in November 2015. It is great to have you here in Stockholm.

The crisis in Syria is now on its sixth year. No person in Syria is unaffected by the war. As many as 470 000 might have been killed. 13,5 million are in urgent need of aid. There is a lack of all the basics: food, water, medicines and housing. The humanitarian situation is alarming. Families are constantly seeking refuge from war and oppression. Behind every figure there is a person, someone like you and me that are affected. And in refugee camps people are struggling to survive in desperate conditions, where women and children are vulnerable to harassment, exploitation and abuse.

The war in Syria has had significant effects both regionally and globally. Some of the children that seek asylum in Sweden are Afghans that have grown up in Iran. There are reports that even some of these children are refugees affected by the war in Syria, suggesting that they are fearing and fleeing enrollment to become soldiers in the Syrian war.

Out of them the European Union as a whole received around one million in 2015. It is mine and the Swedish governments strong belief that if the EU would have managed to already in 2015 give a collective response to the refugee crisis and put into practice the fundamental EU principle of solidarity we would have managed the situation perfectly well. If all the member states within the EU would have given shelter to the same amount of refugees as Sweden had done already before the dramatic fall of 2015, we

would have been able to provide a safe haven for all those over 4 million that have fled Syria.

But as you know the responsibility is not evenly shared. During the autumn Sweden, with 2 % of the EU population alone received 23 % of the Asylum Seekers to the EU. At the total 162 877 asylum seekers arrived in Sweden in 2015, including 70 384 children of school age. The number of unaccompanied minors was 35 369.

To give you some highlights of how we today work to meet our new children, that has come to Swedish schools from war and refuge, I need to give you a background of the Swedish School System as such. We face some major challenges broader than the one's directly connected to the large numbers of new students. To summarize: The attractiveness of the teaching profession has been low, we lag behind in early intervention, there are deficiencies in the steering of the education sector and we see increasing school segregation. None of these challenges are, as you understand, the result of Sweden taking our responsibility for the refugee crisis. These challenges are systemic.

The Swedish Government has invited the OECD to make a special report, analyzing the education system and we are now developing a comprehensive agenda for reform together with a specially assigned School Commission, gathering key expertise and stakeholders from the Swedish Education Sector.

To build a school that are able to include newly arrived children and provide for them an education that create opportunities for the future, is first and foremost about achieving quality education for each and every child. A school that is robust and flexible enough to give a fair chance for every child is the best possible precondition for newly arrived children to develop their knowledge and skills. Attractiveness of the teaching profession, early intervention and investments in greater equity are key priorities for our government. That includes such measures as increased teacher salaries, a high quality teacher training and increased cooperation between The National Agency for Education and education providers on measures to raise results in schools with a poor academic record and difficult preconditions. The Government is furthermore allocating additional resources to those municipalities taking a larger responsibility for newly arrived pupils. We also allocate funds to employ more teachers in the early years in school as well as to attract experienced teachers to schools with greater challenges.

The Government is also investing in improved health services for pupils and

school libraries. These are examples of components that are of importance for every child but have even greater significance to those newly arrived to Sweden or to those who are struggling in school. For children with trauma from living in a war zone, the quality of the health service for pupils can be life changing. For children with few Swedish books at home, the school library is even more important in opening up new horizons.

One of the strengths of the Swedish Education System, as identified by OECD, is a capable and committed profession. The present situation shows that clearly: The profession has despite operating in a too weak system found room for all those children that came to Sweden in the autumn of 2015. It was done through the hard work of teachers, principals and municipalities.

However, the greater task lies ahead. These kids, that has been given a place shall now be given the opportunity to the knowledge needed to build a new life. The magnitude of new students challenges of course the ability of our educational system to meet the needs of newly arrived children and give them the best possible preconditions to learn. It is critical to realize, at the same time, that the successful integration of newly arrived children will be an absolute must for our societies economic competitiveness as well as for social cohesion. And above all, every child, regardless of background, has the right to quality education. There is no alternative.

Looking at the figures of students reaching the qualifications requirement for upper secondary school and the increasing school segregation in Sweden there is a lot that will have to be done.

Statistics from the Swedish National Agency show that children who have immigrated to Sweden after the age of 7 qualify for a national program at the upper secondary level to a far less extent than other pupils.

However, a foreign born child that has arrived in Sweden before the age of 7, at the start of compulsory school, has on average almost the same chances as a Swedish born child to achieve equal results. Challenges to providing a fair chance for every one remain. But the positive note is that increased number of years in the Swedish school has a significant positive effect. Furthermore, we are observing a positive development of results for children born abroad that have lived in Sweden for more than four years. The development is especially encouraging for girls. In essence, more time in school increases the chances to succeed.

Poor mapping of migrant children's previous knowledge and skills, the

separation of newly arrived learners from the mainstream education, for too long, and a lack of individualized support are therefore clearly important explanatory factors for today's poor performance.

In light of that, Sweden has decided to introduce a mandatory assessment of newly arrived children's knowledge. The assessment aims at mapping the child's previous schooling and level of knowledge and skills in literacy and mathematics. Based on this assessment, the school principal will decide on the grade the child is to be placed in, the allocated teaching time for subjects, and the educational support the school will provide. Through this measure we want to ensure that each pupil gets individualized and proper support.

In addition, pupils in primary and secondary education with a mother tongue other than Swedish are entitled to mother tongue tuition. They are also entitled to tuition in their mother tongue in other subjects. A tool the Government recently expanded and improved. This increases the chance for a smooth transition to the Swedish school and lessens the risk of newly arrived children lagging behind in school compared to the knowledge base they already have with them arriving to Sweden. There is strong research evidence that fluency in the mother tongue also increases the ability to learn and master the Swedish language. Linguistic capital is, so to say, valuable regardless of the currency used to acquire it. And while exchanging linguistic currency is important and at times can be challenging, linguistic capital is always essential to succeed in school.

The allocation of newly arrived children between municipalities has been very unequal. Some municipalities have received a large proportion as compared to their inhabitants while others barely none. Last known figures, 4 percent of our schools took responsibility for a third of all newly arrived pupils. Sweden demands the EU to share the responsibility in solidarity. The same holds true for Swedish municipalities.

We are therefore through already passed or prepared new laws ensuring that all municipalities and also the most popular schools will share the responsibility of receiving newly arrived children. Our experiences from earlier integration processes, especially from the early 1990's, are that the school is a crucial meeting place, where young people with different backgrounds and life experiences interact. Today, Swedish Schools are more segregated. Therefore, we have to work hard to accomplish a school that is less segregated and where all parts of society meets in classrooms and school yards.

We do recognize the challenges but to fail is not an option. And we have succeeded in the past. The refugees migrating from The Balkans as children in the 1990's are when it comes to higher education today actually more established in society than Swedish born. And when it comes to several other factors they are in practice equally established to those born I Sweden.

It can be done. And it will be done again.

Before I finish, let me thank the European Commission for great cooperation in organizing and providing support to make this a successful event.

It is a joint European responsibility to make sure that each and every child are provided opportunities for quality education. To succeed, it is very important that we share and learn from each other. I wish you great days of sharing and learning.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Education and Research

Speech at 38th session of UNESCO General Conference

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Mr President of the General Conference, Mr Chair of the Executive Board, Madame Director-General, Distinguished Delegates,

It's an honour for me to address the 38th General Conference of UNESCO. Sweden fully aligns itself with the EU statement.

We live in a time of huge transformation. The defining challenge is countering climate change. We need a course of action to create a low-carbon and climate-resilient world economy. The escalating conflicts stemming from draught and climate change shows clearly that the world must reach a fair, ambitious and legally binding agreement in Paris in December. It's not a choice, but a necessity for the survival of our civilisations as we know them. UNESCO's work with regards to the Ocean and freshwater is crucial. Sweden supports the Small Island Developing States or more appropriately Large Ocean States in addressing the specific challenges they are faced with.

The new Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is a milestone. It is universal and we all have a responsibility for its realisation. UNESCO has an important role in translating the goals into concrete action. We look forward to engaging with all of you in the work ahead of us.

A sustainable future is impossible without ensuring gender equality. It is time to once and for all get rid of the oppressing structures that hinder women from the right to decide over themselves and to participate in political and economic life. Anything else is an immoral waste of human talents. Equal

rights and the right to education is a priority for the Swedish Government's feminist foreign policy.

Inclusive and equitable quality education for all girls and boys features prominently in the Agenda 2030. Education for all is a key driver for change and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education are key components. Comprehensive sexuality education, as shown by UNESCO's programme, is essential in the work towards both gender equality and sustainable development.

In order to achieve fair and equal societies, UNESCO also has a vital role in promoting access to information and press freedom. Sweden will continue to engage on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. The upcoming conference with news organisations in February will provide a unique platform for dialogue on journalists' safety. We also welcome UNESCO's recent report on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development and we invite more countries to contribute to this. UNESCO must continue to promote human rights, including freedom of expression, on-line as well as off-line.

It is unacceptable that journalists are killed and threatened when they do their job. We must speak up on behalf of those who have had their own voices silenced, like the Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak. Our aim is that he should be released.

Mr President,

While we need joint efforts in building a more sustainable future, we also need collective action for the challenges of today. The current refugee situation is a global crisis. Sweden is proud that many refugees over the years have made Sweden a second home country. They have contributed to build Sweden richer. Sweden will continue to take its responsibility. In this situation more countries need to give help to those in need. It is a human right to seek and if in need enjoy asylum. Sweden has a clear stand: no state can flee its legal or international obligations. Global crisis demands global responsibility.

To solve the crisis, the horrors in Syria must be stopped. Addressing the root causes of the conflict in Syria is key. That is why all actors – regional as well as international - must intensify their efforts in support of the UN-led political track and a political solution. The fabric of entire civilizations is torn apart. When artists and journalists cannot work, books are burnt and cultural

heritage is destroyed it is a sign of repressive, dark times. It is also the moment when UNESCO's mandate is more important than ever.

Sweden strongly supports the implementation of the cultural conventions and the actions undertaken by UNESCO and the global community to counteract the demolition and the illicit trafficking in cultural objects. A Nordic initiative for enhanced international collaboration will start in Oslo in December this year.

Distinguished Delegates,

Sweden has always been a strong supporter of the UN, both politically and financially. And, over the years, Sweden has stood by those in the world who fight against repression and inequality and for independence and dignity. We now seek your confidence for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for the period 2017-2018. We will work towards a more representative, transparent and effective Council that can respond swiftly to the security challenges of our time.

Mr President,

We would also like to acknowledge all the hard work carried out by the UNESCO staff and the Director-General, Madam Bokova. Sweden fully supports the Director General's work for reform of UNESCO and we are actively engaged for better governance of the Organisation. Through further reform UNESCO will be even more relevant and more focused on its mandate, which will deliver more results. In order to do this, the budget level must match the goals we have set up for the Organisation.

As I said at the outset, we live in a time of huge transformation and the founding ideas and principles of UNESCO are as vibrantly urgent as ever. Sweden stands ready to continue our important joint work ahead to create a sustainable, equal and peaceful development for all women and men.

Thank you.