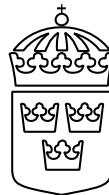


# Human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in Swedish foreign policy

Government Communication  
2016/17:62





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the rule of law in Swedish foreign policy

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The Government submits this Communication to the Riksdag.

Stockholm, 8 December 2016

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(Ministry for Foreign Affairs)

### Main content of the Communication

In this Communication the Government sets out its ambitions and priorities for work on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in Swedish foreign policy. The Communication provides an account of trends in the world as a whole and the instruments that Sweden has at its disposal for action in this regard. It asserts that human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law must be an essential element in all Swedish foreign policy. The Communication also asserts that Sweden is to be a global leader in furthering, preventing and influencing developments in these three areas.

Separate communications have already been submitted to the Riksdag on human rights and democracy in foreign policy and in development cooperation. The first Communication, *Human rights in Swedish Foreign Policy*, was produced in 1997 (1997/1998:89). In that same year the Government also submitted the Communication *Democracy and Human Rights in Swedish Development Cooperation* to the Riksdag. In 2003 the Communication *Human Rights in Swedish Foreign Policy* was drawn up (2003/04:20), while the Communication *Human Rights in Swedish Foreign Policy* (2007/08:109) was submitted in 2007. *Freedom from Oppression – Government Communication on Swedish Democracy Support* (2008/09:11) was submitted in 2008, focusing on democracy support as part of development cooperation.

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## 1 Introduction

*“Sweden is and will continue to be a strong voice that stands up for and defends human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law throughout its foreign policy.”*

– Margot Wallström, December 2015

The idea that certain freedoms and rights are due to all individuals solely because they are human is not a new one. However, international cooperation to codify human rights did not begin until after the Second World War. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. The Declaration was followed in 1966 by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which today are binding in customary international law. The rights were divided into two covenants as a consequence of the prevailing political context at the time they were adopted. However, human rights themselves are indivisible and universal. The two covenants from 1966 are thus mutually reinforcing instruments.

The adoption of the Universal Declaration and the aforementioned UN Conventions established not only the importance of human rights for the international community, individual countries and individuals, but also the close link between human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

Since the Second World War a number of international instruments have been adopted in this area. These comprise both legally binding conventions and non-legally binding declarations, as well as political memoranda of understanding. They cover economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights. The instruments include the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This international legal system founded on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law must be constantly defended. This has become particularly clear in the light of the repressive and reactionary trend we are seeing in several parts of the world today, where the validity of human rights in particular is increasingly being called into question. Respect for human rights must therefore be safeguarded and deepened, and cannot be taken for granted. Equally, human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law must be addressed as an integrated whole. The preamble to the Universal Declaration itself states that human rights should be protected by the principles of the rule of law and Article 21 states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen

representatives. We can see that the countries that are undemocratic are also those that are failing to operate under the rule of law and with respect for human rights.

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Tirelessly working to strengthen respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law has therefore long been, and will continue to be, one of Sweden's foremost priorities in every aspect of foreign policy.

The utmost importance of such a priority is emphasised by the political history of the post-war period. Stages in which human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are strengthened constantly recur in courses of events that have increased people's freedom and well-being.

The transformation of Poland from a Communist dictatorship into a democracy is one such example. Here the survival of civil society and unionisation played an almost mythical role. The Catholic Church provided intellectual breathing space and a platform for civil society in its widest sense. Church buildings were places where people were able to read a newspaper, watch a play or view an art exhibition that had not been sanctioned by the regime. Solidarity, founded at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk, was the first trade union in the then Eastern Bloc not to be controlled by a Communist party. In the space of a year, Solidarity had approximately ten million members in regional divisions across Poland. Poland is an illustrative example, but far from the only one, of the way strides in human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law must be actively defended; they do not automatically uphold themselves. Indeed, it takes a very long time to develop institutions that are so firmly rooted as to prevent a democratic system in line with the rule of law being overturned in a short space of time when the political wind changes.

Post-war history also shows that human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law must go hand in hand. One of the reasons why the US abolished the laws that gave people different rights depending on their skin colour and ethnicity is what Harvard professor Joseph Nye terms "soft power" – the ability to attain your goals through the power of attraction rather than coercion.

Greater respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law would also mean vastly increased freedoms and a stronger position for women – and thus for the whole of society. Studies conducted by the World Bank show that legislation that is gender neutral and includes parental insurance, for example, contributes towards a higher level of gender equality. At the same time, about 100 countries have restrictions on the types of job women are allowed to have; in Russia no fewer than 456 different career paths are closed to women. In France a woman is not allowed to have a job in which she would have to lift more than 25 kilos.

Abolishing all legislation in the world that discriminates against women and girls would be a huge reform that would not only increase freedom but also have major positive economic impacts. The importance of improving social, economic and other practical prerequisites to attain actual gender equality is an additional factor.

Principles and a functioning compass are vital tools in a complex world in which progress is constantly confronted by new concerns looming on

the horizon. The equal value and equal rights of all persons are and remain a timeless fundamental principle providing a direction in which to steer. History teaches us that the equal value of all persons will be strengthened by deliberate and long-term work for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law on into the future.

Safeguarding human rights is a cornerstone of Swedish foreign policy. Human rights are a central element in international law and essential to maintaining peace and security, and to fair, gender-equal and sustainable development. They are key to defining and upholding democracy and the principles of the rule of law. At the same time, they depend on democratic systems under the rule of law if they are to be enjoyed in full.

The Government is therefore submitting the second of two Communications to the Riksdag in 2016 containing Sweden's overarching policy on human rights. Communication 2016/17:29 sets out the Government's strategy for national work on human rights. The Government's goal to ensure full respect for Sweden's international human rights commitments serves as a point of departure for the Government's national work.

In this Communication the Government sets out the direction of work on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in foreign policy. Work on the Communication has involved consultations with hundreds of civil society representatives in Sweden and in Brussels, with universities and higher education institutions, and with other agencies.

In submitting these two Communications in autumn 2016, the Government is emphasising that a cohesive Swedish policy to promote and protect human rights – in domestic and foreign policy – is in place.

The foreign and domestic policy dimensions are mutually reinforcing. If Sweden is to be a powerful voice on the world stage, it is essential that Sweden complies with its international commitments on human rights, and this in turn demands a cohesive policy to promote and protect human rights. Otherwise there is a risk that Sweden will lose international credibility. This is particularly relevant in contexts in which we are attempting to urge other countries to take action with the objective of ensuring respect for their own international human rights commitments.

This Communication covers all foreign policy, including foreign and security policy, international development cooperation, and trade and promotion policy. For the first time, Sweden's ambitions and priorities for work on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are set out in an integrated manner. The Communication is therefore closely linked to the policy framework for Swedish development cooperation, also to be submitted to the Riksdag in 2016.

The Communication is structured such that an analysis of the current situation across the globe, in geographic and thematic terms, is followed by an analysis of the status of democracy in the world and a section on the principles of the rule of law. Sweden has traditionally protected civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression, freedom of opinion and freedom of association. Economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to education, the right to health and labour rights, are afforded higher significance in this Communication than has previously been the case. The Government has a clear ambition to take an integrated

approach to safeguarding and promoting human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law such that these elements are able to reinforce each other. There are a large number of arenas and tools available for implementing the policy, and these are set out in the concluding section.

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## 2 A changing world

People's opportunities to exercise their human rights and be guaranteed democracy and the principles of the rule of law have improved over time. Since the 1970s, many states have made the transition to becoming democracies – at least in terms of introducing multi-party systems and holding regular elections. The majority of the world's states have signed up to the central conventions on human rights, albeit with reservations in some cases. Many countries have adopted new constitutions and laws guaranteeing protection for human rights. Greater respect for the principles of the rule of law has led to more efficient implementation and enforcement of national legislation.

Human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are having a greater impact in international development cooperation. Indeed, they are fundamental prerequisites in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Human rights and gender equality are specifically mentioned in the preamble to the 2030 Agenda, and several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) directly express economic, social and cultural rights. SDG 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, safeguard public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. However, Sweden's aims on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are considerably more ambitious than the goals agreed in the 2030 Agenda.

Despite the progress that has been made, today we are seeing human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law begin to wane across the globe. This is also noted in international fora, in which international human rights commitments are being called into question more frequently than before. Authoritarian states have become increasingly skilled at undermining and reinterpreting binding conventions and accepted concepts and norms, leading to the validity of human rights being questioned in many parts of the world.

Gender equality remains a vision rather than a reality. Violence, oppression and systematic subjugation continue to be part of the daily lives of countless women and girls. People's rights and freedoms are being restricted as the democratic space shrinks and human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are no longer obvious goals for many countries, instead being challenged and facing competition from more authoritarian social models and political ideas.

There is a clear trend towards a growing number of countries adopting laws focused on limiting the space available to civil society in various ways. Shrinking space for civil society engagement makes groups of people that are already vulnerable twice as vulnerable, a prime example being women who face discrimination and attacks purely for being women and also for being representatives of civil society. This is noticeable in authoritarian states in which freedom of expression is restricted despite international commitments to the contrary, and where those who defend and promote human rights or openly voice criticism are threatened, harassed and persecuted. Many authoritarian states have built up expertise and resources to exploit the internet and new technology in order to constrain rather than promote people's freedoms and rights by illegal means, often through extensive surveillance and restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of opinion and the right to information. This not only affects organised civil society, but also individual citizens.

To some states, undermining an international system based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law is itself an explicit goal of foreign and security policy. In democratic countries too, the space for civil society is shrinking, often as a result of counter-terrorism legislation and legislation to counteract other threats to security.

States questioning international norms also has an impact on working life. Employees are prevented from joining unions and working for better working conditions. Anti-union discrimination, harassment, violence and threats are common in many places. Many people, sometimes including children, are working in inhumane conditions.

Work to strengthen respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law needs commitment, flexibility, creativity and mobility, and for methods and approaches to be constantly revised as the external climate shifts. In practice, this means that Sweden needs to continue and deepen its work to build broad-based networks. Multilateral cooperation and close collaboration with civil society across the globe is more important than ever before. The role of foreign missions as clear platforms for dialogue and collaboration with grassroots actors in their respective countries will therefore become increasingly important. Another key issue is continuing to fully support everyone working in various ways to ensure that states guarantee people's rights and freedoms in line with their international commitments, including human rights defenders and civil society organisations.

International development cooperation is an important tool in achieving this. As one of the largest global donors, Sweden has clear added value to offer, not to mention extensive knowledge and experience of helping to shape international development cooperation. This is particularly relevant in terms of promoting and embedding the rights perspective, whereby democracy and human rights are seen as fundamental conditions for development.

The unique position that Sweden enjoys, by virtue of long-term bilateral relations and a tradition of a clear policy to defend human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law, also facilitates cooperation in sensitive areas. Sweden's lasting and long-term engagement on these issues and its reputation as an inclusive and gender-

Many people, particularly in civil society, set great store by Sweden and like-minded countries promoting and defending the cornerstones of human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in European and in global cooperation.

Sweden is and will continue to be a strong voice that stands up for, defends and promotes human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

## 2.1 Europe and its surrounding area

Development on our very doorstep has also suffered a backlash. Hungary and Poland face criticism in a number of fields for their failure to uphold the principles of the rule of law and international human rights conventions. Widespread discrimination against Roma continues in several EU Member States. Anti-democratic forces are growing in several EU countries.

There are worrying tendencies towards Member States standing up for human rights and fundamental freedoms to a lesser degree in Common Foreign and Security Policy. Similarly, it is becoming increasingly common for EU Member States to abandon agreed EU positions in multilateral negotiations.

Russia's repressive policy and influence, including the illegal annexation of Crimea, pose a particular challenge in Europe and its neighbouring area. The general consensus among international assessors is that the human rights situation in Crimea has deteriorated since Russia's illegal annexation in 2014. The situation for the Crimean Tatars is judged to be particularly serious. Since 18 April 2016, their highest executive-representative body Mejlis has been classed as an extremist organisation and has been banned from operating in Crimea. The Russian authorities installed by Russia following the illegal annexation of Crimea have introduced an atmosphere pervaded by fear in which people cannot risk freely expressing their opinions. The problems that have most clearly emerged in UN reports include discrimination against persons who have refused to apply for Russian citizenship, arbitrary deprivation of liberty without a fair trial and reduced media pluralism and freedom of the press, including media institution closures and fewer broadcasts in minority languages. Freedom of religion has also been restricted, and five churches have been forced to close in the past two years.

As a consequence of destructive Russian action, the situation in Eastern Ukraine remains serious. According to the UN, almost ten thousand people have been killed, twenty thousand injured and 1.8 million forced to flee. The ceasefire has been regularly broken along what is known as the contact line.

Russian propaganda and disinformation is undermining people's trust in the media and democratic institutions, contributing towards increased division and antagonism in our societies. Over time, the propaganda risks

eroding the foundations of a common perception of reality and democratic fact-based debate in Europe and the rest of the world.

Labour rights continue to be infringed in Europe. Forced labour occurs in certain countries in Central Asia for economic reasons and as a penalty for people having exercised their human rights. In several countries the state intervenes in the internal business of trade unions and employer organisations, occupational groups are prevented from collective bargaining and the right to strike is restricted. The measures taken in some EU countries due to the financial crisis have weakened social dialogue structures and placed restrictions on the right to collective bargaining.

The situation of independent media in parts of Europe and its neighbouring area is characterised by poor finances, censorship and political influence. In Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and the majority of countries in Central Asia, the state apparatus exercises great power over the media as an important instrument for exercising political influence over the population. Where independent media exist, those involved are often the victims of attempted coercion or various kinds of persecution. In the Western Balkans, this mainly takes the form of the state, as the largest media advertiser, exploiting its influence to control the political content, or media ownership having links with the political elite. In Turkey, political pressure and self-censorship as well as forced management by media conglomerates and attacks on individual journalists have recently led to a deterioration in freedom of expression. Organisations that work with human rights also face pressure in these countries, as do the parts of civil society that draw attention to human rights violations.

A lack of gender equality, stereotypical gender roles, structural gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls are found in the region to varying extents. As in the majority of other regions of the world, women and girls are in a particularly vulnerable situation. Some countries, such as Ireland and Poland have been repeatedly criticised in international reviews on the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and on guaranteeing the right of women and girls to fully enjoy their human rights.

Discrimination and hate crime due to sexual orientation and gender identity are also widely prevalent throughout the region. Many countries lack legislation prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity and many countries also fail to apply existing discrimination legislation. In Russia laws that directly or indirectly discriminate against LGBTI persons have been adopted, including the “gay propaganda law”. LGBTI persons are also generally in a vulnerable situation in society in the rest of Eastern Europe, in the Western Balkans and in Turkey.

Many countries in Europe and its immediate vicinity also display growing xenophobia, intolerance and hate crime against migrants and asylum seekers. This results in challenges in upholding the right to asylum, but also in challenges to individuals enjoying their human rights in general. Migrant children are often in a particularly vulnerable situation.

Human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law form the backbone of the broad security concept and the rules-based security policy system on which European security, in particular, is founded. When these rights, principles and norms are undermined, this thus constitutes a security policy threat to Sweden and Europe.

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## 2.2 Middle East and North Africa

After the Arab Spring, some countries in the Middle East and North Africa underwent free and fair elections and adopted new laws and constitutions that better guarantee respect for human rights. The region has also seen significant socioeconomic development in the past thirty years, particularly regarding health and education. Youth unemployment continues to pose a major problem in the region.

However, in the past five years, the region has been characterised by a democratic reversal. Political turbulence in the form of popular mobilisation and demonstrations in the hope of democratisation have invoked tensions and conflict in the wake of the revolutions. However, overall development in Tunisia since the revolution in 2011 has been positive; a democratic constitution has been adopted, free elections held, and reform of the police and justice system has begun. The rivalry of regional powers has created widespread uncertainty and major difficulties throughout the region. This is reinforced by the challenges of weak, conflict-torn or disintegrating states such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Palestine.

The whole region is dominated by a negative trajectory with a return to, or the development of, armed conflicts or political systems characterised by authoritarian methods of governance and structural discrimination. This gives rise to limited and often shrinking political freedom, little political influence, especially for women, and shrinking space for civil society. At the same time, the region's vulnerability to climate change and negative environmental impact brings greater risks of a decline in social development and creates a breeding ground for conflicts.

Ensuring compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law in the conflicts of the region remains a challenge, particularly in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Palestine. Fundamental rights and freedoms are severely limited, including in Iran and Saudi Arabia, particularly for women and girls. The death penalty is widespread in these countries.

Restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of association have increased in several parts of the region. Limitations have been imposed through legislation, through restrictive application of the law and through a harsher climate for debate which reduces space for civil society. There are worrying signs of this in Egypt, for example. In Israel too, which has traditionally had an active and free civil society, this space has shrunk. This affects the media, political parties and civil society. War, armed conflict, terrorism and mass displacement of persons are additional challenges that have led to the

mobilisation of people against each other, in the form of collective identities. Strengthened democracy and greater respect for the rule of law and human rights, especially freedom of religion, are overarching goals of Sweden's development cooperation in North Africa and the Middle East.

Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable in the region. In several countries, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, forced labour occurs in which the rights of migrant workers are not respected. Female migrants are particularly affected by harassment as they often work in sectors that are not covered by occupational health and safety legislation. This applies not least to all the migrants who work as domestic workers.

Development in the field of gender equality has been contradictory. Women and girls' enjoyment of human rights has been improved in several countries in the region in terms of education and health. On the other hand, women in general have not gained more political and economic power. This is due, for example, to discriminatory legislation, social barriers, structural discrimination, weak institutions and insufficient legal protection for women and girls.

Similarly, there have not been any major changes in the view of gender equality. Attitudes to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, the opportunity for LGBTI persons to demand equal rights and opportunities and a strong cultural divide between the private and public sphere remain virtually unchanged. This is also the case regarding widespread acceptance of the major discrepancy in the division of unpaid work between women and men, as well as traditions surrounding honour-related violence and oppression.

Sweden's humanitarian aid seeks to strengthen the right of women and girls to protection in humanitarian crises, conflicts and disasters, and enhance their opportunities to play an active role in responding to these. Sweden has a regional strategy for development cooperation with the Middle East and North Africa for the period 2016–2020 in which support for human rights and democracy is a central component.

## 2.3 Sub-Saharan Africa

The countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are characterised by a variety of conditions and circumstances. At the same time, certain trends can be identified for the region as a whole. Economic poverty, for example, has decreased since 1990, seen as a percentage of the population. Today an estimated 43 per cent of the population live in poverty, the majority of whom in what are known as fragile states.

In general, it can be said that, despite the problems the continent faces, the situation in terms of human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law has improved in the past fifty years. The number of armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa has gradually fallen. African countries are taking on ever greater responsibility for conflict resolution and regional development. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region that receives the highest proportion of Swedish development cooperation.

Following a period of general democratic development on the continent, with general elections, stronger parliaments and ratifications of more international and regional conventions, the development of a democratic culture and democratic institutions, as well as the principles of the rule of law, remain a challenge for a majority of countries. Several states have restrictions on the presidential term of office written into the constitution and have respected these rules in repeated elections, e.g. Liberia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, Namibia and Botswana. In many countries, however, sitting heads of state remain in power, which results in power struggles, abuses of power and corruption. Current examples include Gabon, the Republic of Congo and Burundi, with older examples being Zimbabwe and Cameroon. In some countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, it is clear that the sitting president will exceed the currently valid constitutional mandate period.

A lack of political will, especially at national level, coupled with a deficient ability to deliver the services of society contributes towards dissatisfaction, engenders conflict and counteracts social and economic development. Corruption and economic mismanagement undermine potential growth. Laws that restrict opportunities of local civil society to operate have been adopted or are being discussed in several places in Africa, including Kenya, Ethiopia and Rwanda.

The right to education has made strides in the region, with several countries now providing free schooling. At the same time, there are hidden charges in the form, for example, of textbooks and school uniforms, which prevent many people from participating in education. The majority of the world's children without education are found in Sub-Saharan Africa. Girls are particularly affected as the education of boys is often afforded higher priority, and because girls abandon education before reaching the school leaving age to a greater extent than boys.

In several places the war on terrorism has taken forms that restrict freedom of association and freedom of speech. In some cases, national security services have also had their powers extended, at the expense of citizens' rights and freedoms. The shrinking space for civil society and the media to work freely is a growing problem. Business also has limited opportunities to organise.

Environmental degradation, exhausted natural resources and climate change put pressure on ecosystems. Together with limited access to modern and sustainable energy, this makes it harder for people to earn a living and reduces resilience, as well as risking creating tensions and conflicts. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the extraction of charcoal, timber, gold and minerals is helping to deplete natural resources and finance violence against women, children and men.

Employment across large swathes of the region takes the form of informal, insecure jobs, with insufficient pay and without labour rights or access to social security systems. Women are over-represented in the informal sector and among unpaid occupations. Sub-Saharan Africa is also the region that has the highest prevalence of child labour, with 59 million child workers, equivalent to more than 21 per cent of the number of children in the area.

The opportunity of women and girls to enjoy human rights has improved in the past decade, for example regarding the proportion of women elected to national parliaments, and the African Union's emphasis on the situation of women. At the same time, women across Sub-Saharan Africa continue to be restricted by unfair access to legal rights, education, land and financial capital, and the opportunity to have a political voice, particularly in conflict-torn settings.

The rights of the child are recognised by largely all African states through ratification of the regional African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. All African countries have also ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, this convention is often ignored by national application. Human rights for persons with disabilities are also an area where progress lags behind.

Recent years have been characterised by a tougher climate in Sub-Saharan Africa on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and harmful customs, but also in terms of LGBTI persons exercising their human rights. Work with the Midwives4all campaign has been one way of strengthening the role of midwives in development cooperation through public diplomacy. New legislation has been adopted that not only concerns sexual acts but also restricts freedom to organise and freedom of expression for LGBTI persons. This also affects access to health and medical care.

## 2.4 Asia and Oceania

Asia and Oceania is a hugely varied region in terms of human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law and encompasses great ethnic, political and religious diversity. The region contains everything from healthy democracies to ultra-authoritarian states with severely curtailed citizens' rights. Social and economic development has been extremely strong in Asia in general over the past twenty years, which has had a positive impact on economic and social rights. However, more than 1.5 billion people in the region still live in poverty, amounting to more than half of the world's poor. The election of a popularly elected government in Myanmar is one positive development in this respect.

This description focuses on the areas where challenges remain. For example, the situation regarding freedom of the press and freedom of expression is classified as poor or very poor in more than half of the countries in the region.

In recent years, several countries in the region have adopted an increasingly repressive attitude against, e.g. civil society organisations, the media, human rights defenders, environmental activists and unions. This is the case in countries including China, Bangladesh and Vietnam. Development in many countries is characterised by precisely this contradiction – greater scope but also greater control – with Vietnam as a prime example. It is not possible to underestimate the importance the internet has had for the development of civil society in the region and for people's opportunity to obtain information and express themselves.

The impact of the internet and social media has also led to citizens being considerably better informed – especially the younger population – and contributed towards a growing and more independent civil society that is strengthened by social media and innovative forms of collaboration. Widespread impunity and authoritarian forms of government in many places are leading to less space for civil society and the principles of the rule of law being set aside. In the Philippines, thousands of presumed criminals were killed in a campaign against drug-related crime. The military coup in Thailand was followed by a clampdown on freedom of expression and freedom of association. In North Korea the human rights situation remains very poor. The death penalty is applied in many countries in the region and the number of executions has increased, especially in Pakistan.

The region contains more than 7.7 million people who according to the UN Refugee Agency are refugees, internally displaced persons or stateless, who are living in difficult conditions, in many cases caused by armed or ethnic conflict.

In a number of Asian countries, labour rights are severely curtailed and trade unions are subjected to repression by states and by companies alike. All in all, this makes it more difficult to exercise the right to collective bargaining and to conduct a constructive dialogue between the social partners. Weak structures and deficiencies in rights also make it more difficult to safeguard the rights of domestic workers and migrant workers, the majority of whom are women. Human trafficking and forced labour are a major problem, including in South-East Asia. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking for sexual purposes.

Corruption is widespread. One of the major consequences is severe failure of the rule of law, resulting in weaker protection for predominantly women's, children's and minorities' enjoyment of their human rights. The level of gender equality and respect for women's rights varies greatly between and within the countries in the region. There are major gender differences when it comes to economic opportunities and political influence in society. Many countries lack legislation that guarantees women their full rights, and have traditions and attitudes that pose an obstacle to greater gender equality. Progress has been made in the latter area, mainly in terms of the right to health and education, but blatant violations of the rights of women and girls, not least in the form of child labour, forced marriage and violence against women and girls continues in many countries.

Religious extremism has increased and constitutes a threat to human rights in the region, where religious extremists exercising power are both governmental and non-governmental actors. Examples of religiously motivated human rights infringements include the murder of secular bloggers in Bangladesh, attacks on religious minorities in Pakistan and Taliban-led measures that seek to prevent women and girls from attending school in Afghanistan. The Muslim Rohingya minority in Myanmar is considered by the UN to be one of the world's most persecuted minorities whose enjoyment of human rights continues to be strictly limited.

The link between development that is sustainable in environmental and climate terms on the one hand and human rights, democracy and gender equality on the other is clear in Asia, particularly for people living in poverty. Environmental and climate problems affect the conditions in which people live and rights such as access to clean water, food, sanitation and health. A democratic deficit and a lack of respect for human rights and land rights affect people's opportunities to demand accountability and to be able to contribute towards dialogue and decisions for more sustainable development. Many countries have problems in taking action against the exploitation of land and other natural resources. This affects the poorest of all and the most marginalised individuals, including primarily women in rural areas and indigenous peoples, and is a fundamental cause of social tension and conflict. Greater environmental awareness has led to greater civil society action on environmental issues, with the consequence of increasing numbers of environmental activists and human rights defenders experiencing threats from both State and private actors.

One important part of Swedish development cooperation in Asia seeks to strengthen the work of civil society in improving accountability and enlarging democratic space and encouraging regional actors and national institutions in their work to promote and protect human rights. Regional development cooperation has a particular focus on the link between the environment, climate and human rights, democracy and gender equality.

## 2.5 Latin America and the Caribbean

Important progress on peace, democracy and human rights has been made in recent decades in Latin America. Armed internal conflicts have reached peaceful conclusions, in several cases through peace agreements, the most recent in Colombia, where the continent's longest armed conflict finally reached an end. Democratic government is now the norm – all presidents, with Cuba as the one exception, are now democratically elected. The return to democracy and the end of armed conflicts has shone a spotlight on the establishment of democratic forms of government, the rule of law and issues related to transitional justice, albeit not without challenges. Transitional justice is a term that incorporates truth-seeking, justice, restitution and guarantees of non-repetition.

In general, the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have also consolidated their economic policy, following decades of recurring financial crises. Besides good economic growth leading to a growth in the middle classes, social reforms have also helped to reduce poverty considerably. Many countries met the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015.

The region suffers from a generally high level of violence, which is reflected at different levels of society. This can often be associated with organised crime around the drugs trade and trafficking in persons, but ordinary criminality also poses a threat to citizens' safety in many countries. Armed illegal groups often exert influence or control over

parts of the territory, leading to widespread violence. In some areas, conflicts over land and natural resources are also a cause of violence. There is also vulnerability to consequences of environmental destruction and climate change. The poorest people of all and indigenous peoples are often particularly vulnerable.

In many countries the generally high level of violence undermines the opportunities of the rule of law to provide citizens with protection and justice. Organised crime and corruption help to weaken legal institutions and the powers of law and order, with high impunity for both criminal violence and abuse as a consequence. In many cases there are also major obstacles when it comes to investigating and bringing people to justice for crimes committed under past dictatorships. One consequence of the widespread violence is increased use of violence and militarisation. Sweden has helped to raise the profile of and strengthen national work in Guatemala to combat impunity and corruption.

Violence against women, girls and boys is common in the region and often takes place in close relationships. Important progress has been made whereby some countries have taken action by adopting specific legislation, but poor application remains a challenge.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are a sensitive area in most Latin American countries. El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua have an absolute ban on abortion, for example. Most other countries have restrictive abortion laws, with the exception of Uruguay and Cuba. Regarding LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights, a positive trend can be seen in several of the region's countries in which gender-neutral marriage and partnership legislation has been adopted. Several countries are in the process of adopting legislation in this area, and in Argentina the rights of transgender people have been strengthened. Most of the Caribbean islands have legislation that prevents LGBTI persons enjoying their human rights. In general, LGBTI persons continue to be discriminated against and exposed to hate crime throughout the region.

In some areas a negative trend can be identified in terms of media freedom and freedom of expression, and in the space for civil society. Union representatives have also been murdered or exposed to violence and threats, which has seriously curtailed freedom of association and opportunities to represent workers. Legislation has been used to reduce the capacity of critics to voice concerns in the media and to control civil society organisations. In some countries, journalists and human rights defenders suffer threats and violence.

Excessive police violence and difficult conditions in prisons, ill-treatment of internees, delayed trials and long detention periods exist. In Brazil, a number of officials have been taken to court accused of abuse but failings in the legal system are obstructing a trial.

## 2.6 North America

Both the US and Canada see themselves as trailblazers in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Respect for human rights in the US is good, although many of the central human rights

conventions have not been ratified. Under the Obama administration, gender equality and LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights were afforded great scope in American domestic and foreign policy. Same-sex marriage was recognised in 2015. At the same time, the legal protection of LGBTI persons is threatened in several states where discriminatory legislation has been proposed and/or adopted.

The political, economic and social position of women has gradually been strengthened. The proportion of women in business, holding high public office and in academia has increased, but women continue to be underrepresented in the highest positions in both the public and private sectors. The wage gap between men and women has shrunk but remains significant. The right to abortion has long been laid down as a constitutional right but remains a controversial issue.

There are a large number of human rights organisations that operate freely and influence the forming of opinion in the country. The foremost challenges in the US are related to economic and social rights and the restrictions on civil and political rights brought about by counter-terrorism efforts. The US is one of the richest countries in the world, but income disparities are large and are increasing. This contributes towards various forms of structural discrimination but also to opportunities for workers to organize, bargain collectively and the right to strike being limited by employers and authorities in the various states.

The legal system's treatment of the African-American population in particular is a topic of debate. The existence of police brutality and deficient investigation has led to widespread protests and popular mobilisation. African-Americans, who make up 13 per cent of the US population, are grossly over-represented in the poorest layer of society and in the prison population, for example. People of Latin American origin are also over-represented in the poorer part of the population.

Combating terrorism involves restrictions on citizens' rights and freedoms, including detaining individuals without prosecution or trial. Despite the Obama administration's ambition to close the prison at the military base in Guantanamo, suspected terrorists are still being held there, deprived of liberty and without trial. Information has emerged about torture. The US also stands out in a negative sense as the only country on the American continent that regularly applies the death penalty, sometimes after long periods of waiting. The number of death sentences and the number of executions has decreased in the past ten years, however.

In Canada, respect for human rights is good and general living conditions are very good. A number of human rights organisations are working actively in the country. However, major challenges remain in terms of the social, economic and political rights of indigenous peoples. Prime Minister Trudeau's government has the ambition of working to improve the position of indigenous peoples. In Canada too, actions to combat terrorism, including relevant legislation, have been criticised for undermining the rule of law, particularly for ethnic minorities.

The Canadian government, whose composition is completely gender equal, has identified gender equality and women's rights as particularly prioritised issues. The Government has also announced a change in the

### 3 Inclusive and democratic societies

Democracy is the form of government that gives people the greatest opportunity to influence society and their own lives. It creates the best conditions for protecting and strengthening respect for human rights and the principles of the rule of law. Through representative and democratic institutions and processes, the groundwork is laid for every human being to take responsibility for the situation in which they themselves live, participate in the democratic dialogue and hold their elected representatives and representatives of government agencies accountable. Promotion of inclusive and democratic societies must therefore be strengthened.

The shrinking space for civil society in many countries, restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of the media, harassment of political opposition and defenders of human rights, abuse of democratic procedures and undermining election processes are examples of serious global threats that water down the meaning of democracy and erode the promotion of inclusive and democratic communities.

The world's established democracies also currently face major challenges in terms of the process required to constantly regain democracy both as a principle and as a vibrant form of government. Working for continuous dialogue on democracy and what democracy means is important in preventing it being undermined and abused. The fundamental principles of democracy can never be questioned. At the same time, it is essential for people to gain a deeper understanding of different dimensions of democracy. This is increasingly important given the rising populism, disinformation and racism we are seeing today, especially in Europe. It is both a question of credibility and a means of creating inclusive societies, in order – with clear foundations in human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law – to tackle the forces opposing democratic development.

Healthy, gender-equal and democratic societies are also essential for economic, environmental and socially sustainable development. New research shows clear links between democracy and public health, and between a functioning democracy in which public elections are conducted fairly in compliance with the rule of law and economic growth.

At the same time, large proportions of the world's population live in conditions that fail to meet a reasonable standard of living and in many cases in extreme poverty. The issues here are widespread unemployment and a lack of access to health care and education, but also a lack of freedom, power and influence. Promoting inclusive, gender-equal and democratic societies must therefore be integrated in every aspect of

foreign policy and development cooperation. The global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are important tools in this context.

### 3.1 Freedom of expression

**The Government intends to:**

- draw attention to and combat prohibited infringements of freedom of expression in both multilateral fora and bilateral relations
- work to strengthen the right to access to information
- work to improve the safety of journalists, partly by strengthening accountability for violence, threats of violence and other types of harassment against persons who exercise their right to freedom of expression
- work to increase access to an open, free and safe internet in which both freedom of expression and the right to privacy are respected
- work to strengthen an open and democratic media landscape, with a good capacity to resist attempts to spread propaganda and disinformation, partly through support to free and independent media and greater media and information literacy
- emphasise the importance of freedom of expression and transparency, partly through public diplomacy.

A democratic society depends on respect for freedom of opinion and freedom of expression. Respect for freedom of expression is essential to ensure individuals' opportunities to participate actively in political processes and engage in social issues. Respect for freedom of expression and freedom of opinion is also a fundamental criterion that enables a number of other freedoms and rights to be enjoyed, such as freedom of association, freedom of assembly and the right to education.

Freedom of expression incorporates both freedom of opinion and freedom to seek, receive and spread information and ideas of all kinds: in speech, in writing and in print, in artistic form or through another selected means of expression. Freedom of expression thus covers more than the spoken word alone and spans a number of fields, such as journalism, the media, the internet, advertising, politics, religion, culture and education. This also includes the right to information.

All countries are responsible for guaranteeing that freedom of expression is not infringed in prohibited ways, irrespective of whether or not the country in question has ratified a particular convention.

Restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of opinion are often imposed by states on the media, artistic expression and organisations that address political criticism, women and girls enjoying their human rights, LGBTI persons enjoying their human rights and questions linked to practising religion. There is a great need to draw attention to and strengthen freedom of expression in its widest sense, both to protect freedom of expression as such and to support actors working for human rights. In far too many places, opportunities to freely express oneself are being restricted in prohibited ways by violence or threats of violence, as is the opportunity to seek and receive information.

Safety for, and combating impunity for those who threaten or exercise violence against journalists are areas that must be prioritised to a greater extent in multilateral fora and in individual countries. Threats and violence against, and even murders of journalists are a growing problem that constitutes a threat to freedom of speech and democratic debate. Women journalists are often particularly vulnerable. The accountability for this type of crime needs to be strengthened. In armed conflicts across the globe, journalists are the targets of executions, violence and threats of violence. UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, has a special mandate for work on freedom of the press and the safety of journalists. UNESCO is also responsible for coordinating the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

Sweden has long been working to improve the safety of journalists. This involves reactive and proactive measures, such as support for training initiatives to promote independent journalism in general, to deal with and prevent threats and violence. In many cases, lack of rule of law, particularly corruption, play a central role in the safety of journalists, which is why this perspective must remain on the agenda in discussions in this sphere.

In many societies, the internet and new media have become the foremost public platform for social debate and communication. At the same time, many people, especially women, lack access to new technology and the internet and all the opportunities these technologies open up. Working for greater access to a free, safe and open internet is therefore not solely about promoting freedom of expression and human rights, but also about promoting gender equality and economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development.

Many states use the problem of online safety to justify far-reaching violations of people's rights and argue in this context that a balance must be struck between rights and security. This trend has focused on the need to combat the criminal activity of individuals as well as cyber attacks by governments and government-backed actors. Several states have also built up capacity for exercising surveillance and persecuting human rights defenders and political opponents on the internet, even when these individuals are located outside the borders of the country itself.

The increasing amount of repressive legislation and regulation, which covers everything from blocking particular websites to rules limiting financing opportunities for individuals, companies and organisations, not only limits freedom of speech but also people's opportunities to participate in the life of society.

A rights-based element in all discussions concerning the opportunities and challenges opened up by digitalisation is essential to increase access to a free, open and safe internet, and ensure full enjoyment of freedom of expression and other freedoms and rights. Swedish work at the United Nations Human Rights Council to assert that human rights are also applicable on the internet has been particularly important in this context. Similarly, global debates on the future governance of the internet are also central in a rights-based international dialogue on the norms for a digital era.

Work to promote freedom of expression in its full sense, on the internet and elsewhere, is also crucial to counter growing propaganda and disinformation activity from states and from terrorist and extremist groups. Support to independent media is central in this context. Stronger initiatives to improve media and information literacy, especially among young people, and promoting greater knowledge of and access to technology, media and information in general are also important components in this work.

Digitalisation and the huge rise in the amount of personal information and communication taking place online have also fuelled an important debate on the right to respect for private and family life in the digital age. In many parts of the world, the internet and social media are a natural part of the daily lives of many children and young people. Digitalisation brings with it opportunities and challenges regarding the rights of the child.

Issues surrounding privacy, surveillance and safety are rapidly growing in importance. Technological development means increasing numbers of individuals are connected to the internet, generating a huge amount of personal data. As a result, states and companies will be able to access an even more detailed and complete picture of our lives than is possible today.

Access to and use of this information must therefore be compatible with individuals' right to respect for private and family life and with human rights in general. A deeper debate on the right to private life in a digitalised era is therefore essential.

The changing and complex media landscape demands flexibility and support to both large and small actors. It is important that development cooperation keeps pace with and supports technological development and its importance for freedom of expression.

### 3.2 Democratic political institutions and processes

#### **The Government intends to:**

- strengthen democratic political institutions and processes through information and dialogue and contribute towards greater trust in political parties
- support the integrity of election processes and counteract undemocratic election processes being used to legitimise the exercising of power
- strengthen the social engagement, influence and agency of all persons
- contribute towards the discussion of a deeper view of democracy

More countries are conducting multi-party elections than ever before. The formal transition to regular public elections is valuable in its own right, but has not always been followed by deepening and consolidation of democratic processes. In some places, election processes are undermined with the aim of legitimising and cementing power in one leader or one party. Every election that is manipulated and abused risks

weakening trust in democracy. In many countries, suspected electoral fraud has unleashed broad popular protest, showing that people value their right to be able to democratically elect their political representatives. When elections are not fair or just, there is a risk of violence and armed conflict arising.

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Free and fair elections are one of the cornerstones of democracy, but they are not all it takes to create a democracy. Sweden therefore emphasises the importance of people also being able to participate in and influence the society in which they live through political or social engagement between general elections. Sweden's democracy support seeks to pave the way for people to assert and actively exercise their civil and political rights and thus increase influence over the conditions in which they live. Institutions such as International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and Varieties of Democracy bring more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the importance of democracy, making important contributions to the ongoing global debate on the development of democracy. Political parties and parliaments may be weak in many countries, but they are nevertheless crucial institutions for channelling opinions and priorities in society, and capable of resolving conflicts by peaceable means. Election monitoring carried out by international and domestic actors is one way of strengthening trust in the results of elections, and something Sweden contributes towards through election-monitoring initiatives.

It is primarily political parties that are capable of aggregating priorities, negotiating, and formulating overarching political solutions that match citizen's expectations. It is through political institutions that people choose their representatives at local, regional and national level.

The decline in political engagement and lack of trust in many political parties, not least in Europe, is a key challenge in improving people's democratic participation. The long Swedish tradition of municipal self-government is an important experience to pass on in this respect. Municipal partnership programmes between Swedish municipalities and municipalities in partner countries seek to stimulate long-term self-supporting relationships.

In many countries, democratic institutions and the rule of law are weakened by widespread corruption. Corruption is a major threat to the democratic development of society as it erodes the legitimacy of the rule of law. Combating corruption is important, as a society free from corruption is one of the fundamental pillars of a democratic, well-functioning state under the rule of law.

Well-functioning, independent, effective and transparent social institutions under the rule of law and other democratic structures facilitate participation and accountability. This is central to attaining democratic development, and in particular for enabling individuals to assert and enjoy their human rights. Democratic structures under the rule of law are essential to sustainable development and an important element in attaining the global Sustainable Development Goals. Swedish and international development cooperation plays an important role in strengthening institutions and systems, with capacity building as an integrated element.

Civil service structures under the rule of law are important if people are to be able to trust in democracy. Without independent legal agencies and institutions, electoral processes risk being exploited to legitimise authoritarian regimes. International development cooperation is one example of a tool that can beneficially be used to strengthen democratic, political institutions and processes, as is already being done today to a large extent. Information and dialogue are also needed to raise the profile of and so strengthen democratic institutions and processes. This work is crucial in preventing conflict and in reconstruction work following war and conflict.

Swedish experiences of stable, independent institutions with associated regulatory frameworks, ombudsmen, transparency, good relations between labour market partners, openness and participation including through public environmental assessments, urban planning, discrimination legislation and national auditors are of the utmost interest to many countries and deserve to be particularly highlighted. Effective government administration under the rule of law binds society together and is vital to human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law. Sweden has great experience of building an independent and successful government administration.

### 3.3 Space for civil society

**The Government intends to:**

- support and defend a wide range of civil society organisations and actors with the aim of strengthening democracy and people's participation
- draw attention to and criticise decline in civil society opportunities to act in both multilateral fora and bilateral relationships
- protect, support and promote a broad spectrum of human rights defenders under threat
- use adapted, flexible, innovative, effective and sustainable forms of support in development cooperation to aid a civil society in transition and under greater pressure, especially in societies under authoritarian rule.

A vibrant and pluralistic civil society that is afforded the space to operate independently is essential to a democratic society. This is also why such a large proportion of Swedish development cooperation is channelled to and through civil society organisations. Civil society actors play a particular role as advocates and opinion formers for individuals and groups in a democracy, as well as fulfilling an important scrutinising function.

Participation in civil society, for example through clubs and societies, creates meaning, fosters participation and development for many people, and provides opportunities to further issues in a way that individuals cannot. Countries in which civil society is given space to operate also tend to be countries where corruption is lower and where the principles of the rule of law are afforded greater respect. In this way, active civil

At the same time, today we are seeing the space for civil society being restricted in many parts of the world. This is done by means of repressive legislation, through measures motivated by counter-terrorism and national security that are intended to combat democratic movements or political opposition, through administrative measures that impede opportunities for financing, and through violence or threats of violence. Often restricting the scope of civil society means infringing a number of human rights, particularly freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.

The shrinking space for civil society is also notable at international level, not least in multilateral fora. This partly involves certain countries questioning the democratic social model as such, and partly member countries in certain organisations opposing scrutiny and involvement on the part of civil society.

This is notable, *inter alia*, in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) work on human rights, in which certain states are acting to limit civil society participation. A corresponding negative trend is seen within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). As far as Sweden is concerned, counteracting the forces that are attempting, in various ways, to find means of excluding civil society from contexts in which it may create major added value is an important priority, including within multilateral fora.

The space afforded civil society must therefore be a distinct topic in foreign policy dialogue, in multilateral and bilateral contexts alike. Alongside growing restrictions on civil society, the forms and conditions for its operation are changing in line with globalisation and technological development. There must therefore be a debate on civil society, and civil society must be strengthened on all fronts. In many places, new media and the internet have become the only genuine alternative for conducting oppositional debate, for example. Consistently working to strengthen analogue and digital freedom of speech is therefore important in counteracting the shrinking space for civil society.

Civil society organisations can also provide support and protection for other civil society actors exposed to violence and pressure, both groups and individual activists. Similarly, the role of individual human rights defender is closely linked with civil society's opportunities to act. Many states are increasingly impeding the work of human rights defenders. These individuals or groups are often both part of civil society and campaigning for marginalised and vulnerable groups. The role of human rights defenders is therefore central to maintaining a vibrant civil society and something that is given priority in the development cooperation of both Sweden and the EU.

Supporting and defending a wide range of civil society organisations and actors with the aim of strengthening democracy and people's participation is a priority for Sweden. Both organisations working for human rights, gender equality, democracy and the principles of the rule of law at national level and grassroots engagement through popular movements and associations, e.g. on education issues, environmental and climate issues, sporting organisations, teacher associations or unions, all come under this umbrella. New forms of political engagement,

particularly among young people, conducted in online networks and in more informal groupings are also part of this pattern. Cultural actors are important not merely in their own right but also as promoters of democracy and social cohesion. Support for artists in international cities of refuge may be of major importance in this context.

Drawing attention to and continuing to support individual human rights defenders is vitally important. There is often a need to prioritise human rights defenders who are women and/or LGBTI, as they run a particularly high risk of being subjected to abuse on the grounds of their involvement and their gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

In a functioning democracy, the opinions and interests of citizens are channelled through political participation to the political decision-making arenas tasked with deciding on and allocating resources in a society. The work of the Swedish women's movement is one example of successful civil society efforts in that the movement helped to achieve progress on gender equality in Sweden. Lasting change often comes about due to a combination of a strong, multifaceted and committed civil society and political institutions capable of listening.

Support to civil society can also promote the growth of political parties in countries where the latter are lacking or are extremely weak. All in all, this creates new challenges for designing civil society support that is flexible, innovative and effective. As the conditions and opportunities for actors to work in difficult environments change, are restricted and even rendered impossible, Sweden and other donors need to find new solutions that nevertheless enable continued support and funding.

## 4 Equal rights for all

The principles of the equal value of all individuals and of non-discrimination are fundamental in safeguarding and promoting human rights. Human rights emerged from the idea that all individuals are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Similarly, the principle of the equal value of all individuals is one of the fundamentals of a democracy, realised through institutions tasked with guaranteeing equality before the law, freedom from torture, and access to education and the job market on equal terms.

The principle of non-discrimination in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the human rights conventions is one of the ways in which the equal rights of all individuals are protected.

A large number of the world's states have additionally ratified a number of conventions that seek to protect those in a particularly vulnerable situation or issues that demand a particular need for protection. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Questioning the general validity of human rights and failure to comply with convention commitments, at country level and in multilateral fora, pose a major challenge.

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We are seeing the indivisibility of these rights called into question in that economic, social and cultural rights are being pitted against civil and political rights. This is being done in order to undermine the universality of human rights or to limit individuals' enjoyment of them in specific cases.

As part of this questioning, we are seeing increasing restrictions being imposed on freedoms and rights for individuals but also for civil society actors. This often leads to direct and widespread discrimination.

Persons with disabilities, children as well as adults, also suffer various forms of discrimination, particularly in countries where poverty is rife. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities seeks to promote, protect and safeguard the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Convention focuses on non-discrimination and lists necessary measures for ensuring that persons with disabilities are able to enjoy civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Persons belonging to indigenous peoples have suffered human rights violations for a long time. The problem often has a clear environmental dimension, particularly given the close correlation that exists for indigenous peoples between the issue of human rights and that of land and nature. Mineral extraction and forest clearances in northern Europe and parts of Latin America, as well as oil and gas extraction in parts of Africa, are some examples.

Many Roma live in severe poverty and social exclusion and experience discrimination and obstacles to their full enjoyment of their human rights. This is particularly the case regarding access to education, health care, housing and the labour market.

The European Commission is conducting work to facilitate more effective implementation of the national strategies or measures put in place by Member States within the remit of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. One important starting point in this work should be to combat widespread anti-ziganism in several different ways, for example by recognising and drawing attention to the attacks and abuse to which Roma have historically been subjected.

Restrictions on women and girls being able to exercise their human rights are seen across the world. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women from 1979 protects the rights of women and girls. This Convention provides a framework for combating discrimination against women and encouraging equality between women and men. The Convention entered into force in 1981. Sweden was one of the first countries to ratify it. Today the majority of countries in the world have done so. Unfortunately, many states have made reservations against the Convention in a way that contradicts its object and purpose.

A society free from discrimination is a central objective of Sweden's work on human rights. To attain this, everything from abolishing legislation that infringes individuals' human rights to actively combating prejudiced attitudes and norms is necessary. Similarly, it is important to strengthen and support individuals and groups that are often exposed to

threats in defending human rights, such as women human rights defenders, organisations and individuals working for LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights, and representatives of indigenous peoples.

In many cases, individuals are the victims of discriminatory treatment on several grounds at the same time. Sweden seeks to work to ensure that clearer account is taken of this in work against discrimination and in work with human rights in general. Widespread poverty often poses additional obstacles for individuals who are already discriminated against on one or more grounds. It is not uncommon for discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds to lead to conflict and, in some cases, to armed conflict.

In its worst form, discrimination can lead to crimes against humanity and genocide. Combating discrimination in all its forms is therefore not only important in promoting inclusive, democratic societies but also vital to promoting peace and security and preventing people from being forced to migrate.

## 4.1 Gender equality

### **The Government intends to:**

- be a driving force in work to ensure that all women and girls fully enjoy their human rights
- combat structural, systematic, gender-based and sexual violence against girls and women, in times of peace and in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- counteract impunity for perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence and work for restitution and justice for victims/survivors
- promote the political participation and influence of girls and women in all areas of society
- promote the right of girls and women to education
- work to ensure that boys and men are integrated and engaged in work for gender equality and against gender-based violence
- work against gender-stereotypical assumptions about women and men and promote positive masculinity
- ensure gender mainstreaming throughout development cooperation
- improve the visibility of and strengthen women's influence in peace processes and peace-promotion initiatives and when designing humanitarian interventions
- strengthen girls' and women's economic rights, empowerment and access to economic resources
- work to ensure that all humanitarian implementation organisations have integrated measures to prevent gender-based violence by 2020.

Significant progress has been made globally to promote and protect women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights – not least through the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The United Nations held its first World

Conference on Women in 1980. The Platform for Action from the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 is a milestone in international work to strengthen the position and rights of women, as is UN Security Council Resolution 1325 from 2000 on Women, Peace and Security. Despite this progress, these rights are being eroded in a number of places, including on our own doorstep. We view with concern the way that women and girls the world over are not being guaranteed rights, representation and resources. Rights are encroached upon by means of discriminatory legislation that restricts or denies women's and girls' enjoyment of their human rights, and through practical and social obstacles such as discriminatory and gender-stereotypical attitudes and norms.

Gender equality and fulfilment of the human rights of all women and girls are also vital for all three dimensions of sustainable development, democracy and compliance with the principles of the rule of law. New research shows strong links between the rights of women and girls and successful democratisation. Gender-equal societies also run a lower risk of suffering violence and conflict. The gender-equality perspective is important for achieving lasting peace and political equality and must therefore systematically run through all aspects of foreign policy.

Women's influence and meaningful participation in disaster management and peace building as well as preventing humanitarian disasters contributes towards democracy and greater respect for human rights. This has clearly been asserted in work on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and follow-up resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. Women's political participation also helps to reduce women's vulnerability and has a conflict preventing effect. Women's political participation and influence in peace processes increases the legitimacy, quality and lasting nature of peace agreements and peace processes themselves. Women's participation also improves the likelihood of economic and social recovery following conflict.

Progress has been made on the access of girls and women to education. However, girls still account for the majority of all young people not attending school. Among adults, two thirds of the illiterate persons in the world are women.

Two decades after the World Conference on Women in Beijing, the commitments made are far from met. Countless women and girls still experience a lack of rights, representation and resources. Gender-based violence is one of the most serious structural and systematic threats to women and girls enjoying their human rights. The same is true of LGBTI persons enjoying human rights. These infringements are even worse during humanitarian disasters.

Violence hinders human development, both for the individuals affected and for societies at large. It undermines work to further empower women and girls and safeguard their enjoyment of their human rights, along with the sustainable development of societies in all its dimensions.

Preventive efforts to prevent violence against women and girls and the infringement of women's and girls' human rights are a priority.

It is vital that men and boys participate in gender-equality work to ensure that all individuals are able to have equal power to shape societies

and their own lives and identities in line with human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

Many states enter reservations when ratifying international instruments protecting human rights in a manner that contradicts the object and purpose of the conventions. These types of reservations are particularly common in contradiction of international commitments in relation to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Within the remit of cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC), Sweden is working actively to combat impunity for perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence and working for justice and safety for crime victims exposed to such violence.

The aim of Sweden's feminist Government is for women and men to have the same power to shape society and their own lives. Sweden is also the first country to operate a feminist foreign policy, which means that the whole of foreign policy is to apply a systematic gender-equality perspective. In this way Sweden is able to contribute towards concrete progress and continue to be a strong global voice for gender equality.

A number of tools are available for implementing Sweden's feminist foreign policy, among them the global Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda. An action plan has been drawn up for the Foreign Service's implementation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy.

Sweden's third National Action Plan for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security was adopted in 2016. This National Action Plan lays the groundwork for in-depth work to strengthen women as actors for peace and security. Political will and knowledge are vital factors in this context. Correct data is needed to conduct analyses capable of shedding light on gender equality and power relations and these analyses must take into account girls and women as individuals, with different identities, living conditions, needs and influence.

Within development cooperation, gender equality work covers targeted initiatives, integrated initiatives and dialogue with partners. In addition, Sweden has actively contributed towards multilateral organisations now largely incorporating gender equality as part of their operations.

## 4.2 LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights

### **The Government intends to:**

- continue to be a strong voice and actor for the full enjoyment of human rights by LGBTI persons
- work to further increase the visibility of discrimination on grounds of gender identity
- emphasise sexual orientation and gender identity as grounds for discrimination in various intergovernmental and international fora, in the EU as well as the UN.

The ban on discrimination is deeply enshrined in a number of international and regional instruments. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Council have also explicitly laid down that sexual orientation and gender identity are covered by the principle of non-discrimination in the central human rights conventions.

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Nevertheless, LGBTI persons suffer human rights violations in every part of the world, including through discrimination, violence and threats of violence. This is predominantly, but not exclusively, seen in countries in which the space for civil society and democracy is shrinking. Respect for LGBTI persons enjoying their human rights can in some cases be seen as a measurement and an indicator of the extent to which a state respects human rights – or as a wake-up call in this area.

Sweden is a strong voice backing LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights globally and in the EU and its neighbouring area. Within the EU, guidelines have been drawn up on LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights founded on the principle of non-discrimination to support dialogue with a third country on this issue. Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is banned under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Sweden and other EU states also work to ensure that express references to the ban on discrimination due to sexual orientation and gender identity are introduced and become more generally accepted in the UN system and in other international fora.

In June 2016 the United Nations Human Rights Council decided to appoint an Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In purely practical terms, this means that the issue is now clearly on the Human Rights Council's agenda and that regular reporting will be conducted on the situation regarding LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights. Sweden has been heavily involved and supportive in various ways in the appointment of this UN Independent Expert in the Human Rights Council. In addition, in part through its feminist foreign policy, Sweden will continue to pursue the issue of strengthened gender equality and combating discrimination against women and girls and LGBTI persons.

Development cooperation is another important tool in overall Swedish engagement for LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights in foreign policy. Over the past ten years, Swedish support has increased significantly and is guided by policies and strategies. Today Sweden is an important actor in international development cooperation for LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights and works globally, regionally and locally. The shrinking space for civil society is ultimately a challenge for organisations that work for LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights all over the world. Sweden supports a number of partners who work to strengthen LGBTI persons' enjoyment of human rights through lobbying, building the capacity of organisations and movements, giving support and protection to victims of discrimination and rights infringements, documenting breaches of human rights and cooperation between movements, organisations and countries.

#### 4.3 Sexual and reproductive health and rights

##### **The Government intends to:**

- prioritise increasing the access of women and girls to information and education on sex and relationships, legal and safe abortions, contraception and information about sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS, with this priority also applying to LGBTI persons
- work to ensure that women and girls are able to enjoy their human rights to the full, particularly regarding their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and that combating child and forced marriage is a global priority
- uphold and carry out the Programme of Action from Cairo and the Platform for Action from Beijing and drive dialogue on these forward
- strengthen work to ensure sexual rights without discrimination, abuse and violence, partly by focusing on the rights of LGBTI persons
- include men and boys in work to combat norms and attitudes that make it harder for women, girls and young people to access sexual and reproductive health and rights
- focus development cooperation on increasing access to trained staff, especially midwives, and adequate maternity care in pregnancy and birth, even in conflict, post-conflict and disaster and refugee situations.

Sexual and reproductive ill-health is one of the most common health problems for girls and women in low and middle-income countries. Despite major efforts, maternal mortality remains relatively high across the globe. Unsafe abortions, birth complications or harmful customs such as genital mutilation, can prove fatal. Good sexual and reproductive health is simply essential for human survival.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) covers every person's equal opportunities, rights and conditions to be able to determine over their own bodies and reproduction free from force, violence or discrimination. Unequal power relationships make it particularly difficult for girls and women, and for LGBTI persons, to exercise these rights. In conflict, post-conflict and crisis situations, infringements of the rights covered by SRHR often increase.

Women's particular needs for SRHR that determine the course of their lives have far too often been ignored by humanitarian actors assessing humanitarian needs. SRHR constitute a central element in the protection and support that girls and women, and LGBTI persons, need in conflict, post-conflict and disaster situations, but also form a vital part of work against HIV/AIDS and an important aspect in a number of areas dealing with, e.g. human rights defenders, young people, child and forced marriage and sustainable development.

The International Conference on Population and Development coordinated by the UN in Cairo in 1994 defined reproductive health as a human right for the first time. During the UN's fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, agreements were adopted in which SRHR were asserted as being essential for women and girls to be able to fully participate in every aspect of society. The Plan of Action from Cairo and the Platform for Action from Beijing are important reference documents and have a continued mandate to apply as action plans in work on SRHR.

Although the action plans are reflected in the steering policy documents of many countries, the written word is not always adequately translated into action. Questions such as safe abortions, sex and relationship education, and sexual orientation and gender identity remain controversial from a global perspective.

International commitments – such as the Plan of Action from the UN conference in Cairo and the Platform for Action from Beijing – continue to serve as starting points for Sweden's work on SRHR, while the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and its Sustainable Development Goals are also important documents in this regard. The 2030 Agenda makes a number of strides on gender equality and SRHR and reinforces the mandates of the earlier Plan of Action and Platform for Action.

Sweden has long experience of working on SRHR issues and is a driving force on issues concerning all individuals' equal rights and access to sex and relationship education, contraceptives, legal and safe abortions and LGBTI persons' enjoyment of SRHR. Sweden is a global voice for SRHR and prioritises these issues as a fundamental part of gender equality work and strengthening girls' and women's enjoyment of human rights and empowerment. SRHR are also relevant for boys and men, and also for LGBTI persons' full enjoyment of human rights and empowerment.

An important element comprises advocacy work with the aim of changing discriminatory norms and attitudes on women's and girls' access to SRHR, the same applying to LGBTI persons. Sweden also provides extensive bilateral and multilateral support for organisations working on SRHR; this has included Sweden long being the largest donor of core funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the second largest donor to UNAIDS, the UN's central body for SRHR issues.

#### 4.4 Rights of the child

**The Government intends to:**

- continue to be a powerful voice and act for the rights of the child
- work for children's participation and influence on issues that concern them
- emphasise that the child's perspective and the rights of the child must be respected and highlighted on an ongoing basis at various inter-governmental and international fora, in the EU and in the UN.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989 and states that every child, irrespective of their background, has the right to be treated with respect and have their rights met. Despite this, children often remain in vulnerable situations and are increasingly affected by disasters or conflicts and are forced to migrate unaccompanied.

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to protection from violence and other forms of abuse. Nevertheless, an estimated approximately 120 million girls and 70 million boys are the victims of sexual violence, and almost a billion children are the victims of various forms of physical violence. The 2030 Agenda includes an explicit goal of eliminating all forms of violence against children. Sweden is a strong actor for the rights of the child to protection against violence. The Swedish ban on corporal punishment continues to be the focus of much attention and Sweden is an active participant in many international initiatives to prevent violence against children.

Many children, particularly girls, are forced into marriage and others are forced to work. Children also often lack access to the majority of economic, social and cultural rights such as education and health, contributing towards marginalisation and poverty.

Sweden's long-term goal in terms of the rights of the child is that children and young people should be respected and given opportunities for development and security as well as participation and influence. The aim is partly based on the commitments made by the States Parties in ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child and seeks to promote and protect the rights and interests of children.

#### 4.5 Freedom of religion or belief

**The Government intends to:**

- highlight freedom of expression and freedom of association as being central to protecting freedom of religion
- combat censorship whether of religious expression or of criticism of religion
- defend and protect the freedom of the individual to choose their religion or belief
- systematically increase awareness of freedom of religion and conviction and the ways in which this right can be infringed
- highlight the importance of freedom of religion as an integrated part of broader work to strengthen respect for human rights
- work with religious and faith-based communities to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

Discrimination, harassment and violence linked to people's religious and non-religious identities has soared in line with the global reversal of progress on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in recent years.

Religion has been politicised and nationalism with religious elements is gaining ground on a broad front. Violent extremist terrorist

movements, frequently with religious overtones, spread fear in the countries in which they operate, threatening and persecuting religious minorities and non-religious individuals.

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Religious interpretations and references to religion are also used in the UN and other multilateral fora to question the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls, as well as LGBTI persons. At the same time, religious groups are facing increasing oppression. Growing anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Europe are particularly worrying, as is persecution of religious minorities in other parts of the world. In states where religious freedom is restricted, there is also a tendency for threats, violence and harassment against persons on the grounds of their religious affiliation to be more common than in states where freedom of religion is applied to the full.

Besides covering the right to practise the religion or faith one wishes to, freedom of religion and freedom of conviction encompass the freedom to change religion and belief, the freedom not to hold any religious belief or conviction, and the right to criticise other people's religion or beliefs. Freedom of religion and freedom of conviction are thus closely linked to freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly.

Religious communities have an important role to play in the fight against intolerance, discrimination and human rights violations. Freedom of expression, freedom of information, freedom of assembly, freedom to demonstrate and freedom of religion and conviction jointly form freedom of opinion. These are closely linked, and restrictions on one of these freedoms result in restrictions on the others. Long-term initiatives and cooperation with religion or conviction-based organisations are central to improving mutual and equal respect for everyone's rights.

## 5 Security, justice and accountability

Many societies are characterised by violence, the arbitrary exercising of power, corruption and impunity. It can particularly be noted that impunity for violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, is widespread globally. In such environments, human rights are violated, huge human, cultural and economic assets are squandered, poverty spreads and the environment suffers. Where this is at its most serious, lawlessness, violence and corruption may even cause the entire state to collapse.

Even in peaceful and healthy societies in our immediate environment and among EU Member States, problems are seen whereby important constitutional principles and principles of the rule of law are set aside because they do not suit the political purposes of those in power. Marginalised and poor parts of the population are particularly vulnerable when laws are not respected and human rights are systematically infringed.

Sweden therefore considers that the principles of the rule of law are essential, both as a goal in their own right and as a means of attaining

other goals such as peace, democracy and equal access to various rights and benefits.

There is also a large and growing consensus among states, international organisations and actors in the non-profit community on the content and import of the principles. At its core, this means that all persons, institutions and other groupings, both public and private, are responsible under laws created on democratic grounds, and that these laws must be clear, applied effectively and fairly and be in line with human rights.

Ensuring that the laws are followed is a job for the police, prosecutors, courts and different supervisory bodies, but also for a free and alert civil society, free media exercising critical scrutiny and other public, private and voluntary actors. A system in which political, social or religious norms are superior or considered to be more important than legislation or permit oppression or discrimination is not compatible with the principles of the rule of law.

The work of Sweden, the UN, the EU and the Council of Europe seeks to develop and deepen this consensus and translate it into practice.

Building respect for the principles of the rule of law is resource intensive and time consuming. The approaches and methods must also be adapted to unique conditions and needs. This often involves creating political awareness of the importance of the principles, helping to draft new laws and rules, tackling knowledge and capacity problems within the police, courts and administrative authorities, reiterating the importance of independence, objectivity and equal treatment, and ensuring access to justice for all.

It is important that this work is carried out with broad democratic backing and with input from actors affected by new rules and processes. In many cases, international and regional actors can also play an important role. For example, the European Commission for Democracy Through Law (the Venice Commission) has provided valuable support to many countries on constitutional and rule of law issues. Within the remit of the EU enlargement processes for the Western Balkans and Turkey, the principles of the rule of law have been given a prominent role in the countries' reform and accession processes in line with the new "Fundamentals First" initiative.

Sweden has a long and robust tradition of legality, transparency and impartiality. We also have a wealth of experience of working on these issues internationally. However, the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and other important international and regional processes highlight the need to now do even more in foreign policy and development cooperation to draw attention to and strengthen the principles of the rule of law.

Sweden will encourage even broader engagement among actors from the public, private and non-profit sectors in international work in this field. Sweden will also emphasise the principles of the rule of law in national and regional results strategies and other policies that guide our international development cooperation, and be a driving force in efforts to further the rule of law on the part of multilateral organisations.

**The Government intends to:**

- draw attention to and work for rule of law as fundamental to democracy and good governance, human rights, development and gender equality.
- build opinion, knowledge and capacity around the principle of duty to protect and promote human rights and other norms and tools to prevent and tackle conflict and mass atrocities
- work for accountability at national, regional and international level when violations have taken place
- increase understanding for and capacity to carry out initiatives to demand accountability and restitution following social upheaval, conflicts and serious human rights violations.

After a period of fewer conflicts, the world is now witnessing an increasing number of serious conflicts, with an unprecedented number of refugees and internally displaced persons as a result. As many as 1.4 billion people and 43 per cent of the world's poorest are estimated to live in difficult conditions in conflict-torn and fragile states.

Like all other countries, Sweden has a political obligation, founded in law, to assist, and ultimately take collective action when states are neither able nor willing to protect their population from serious violations such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Conflicts and mass atrocities are also followed by other more long-term challenges to tackle, including the collective and individual consequences of migration and expulsion, sexual and gender-based abuse, property issues and loss of the ability to earn a living. Social trust may have been utterly eroded in entire societies and need to be rebuilt.

Sweden considers that the principles of the rule of law and accountability are vital instruments for preventing conflict and dealing with *de facto* conflicts, and of the utmost importance for the peace-building and society-building that must take place after a conflict.

Building up democratic institutions at local and national level is essential for sustainable peace and state-building. This includes a focus on non-discrimination, gender equality, inclusivity and accountability. Sweden considers that independent inquiries, accountability and restitution are necessary to repair the collective and individual consequences of conflict and abuse and restore fundamental faith in society.

The Stockholm Declaration on Addressing Fragility and Building Peace in a Changing World emphasises the importance of addressing the fundamental causes of conflict, working throughout the cycle of conflict and striving for a common framework for policy, security and development in peace and state-building. This means a greater focus on democracy, human rights and the principles of the rule of law in international peace and state-building. Sweden will work to ensure that the preventive element becomes a more integrated part of peace-building and conflict management.

## 5.2 Freedom from violence, abolition of the death penalty and strengthening the rule of law

**The Government intends to:**

- strengthen the capacity of civil society and institutions to prevent and prosecute all forms of violence and draw attention to the situation and needs of victims of crime
- ensure that the particular vulnerability and needs of women, girls and boys are taken into account in the legal process
- work to abolish torture and the death penalty across the globe and for an end to extrajudicial executions and forced disappearances
- support the work of civil society actors to protect human rights and the principles of the rule of law.

Being a victim of violence is serious abuse and an obstacle to the development of people and societies. International law and human rights therefore oblige states to protect the right to life, freedom and personal safety.

This protection is implemented through the laws, institutions and processes that uphold the principles of the rule of law. In other words, there is a need for laws with specific content, well-educated and efficient police officers and prosecutors, independent courts and a functioning prison and probation service. However, civil society, especially the organisations and individuals that work to defend human rights, also has an important role to play. Many of these organisations and individuals, particularly human rights defenders, active trade unionists, critical journalists and whistleblowers, also work under very tough conditions and may themselves be in need of particular attention and protection.

Sweden intends to particularly draw attention to gender-based violence and the systematic discrimination that still affects at least a billion women and girls across the globe. To combat this, initiatives are needed that create awareness of the needs of women, girls, men and boys for personal safety, legal protection and access to justice on equal terms, as well as insights into the explicit challenges faced by vulnerable individuals. Preventing violence and rehabilitation initiatives are especially important. Women should exert decisive influence when laws on the safety and freedom from violence of women and girls are debated and shaped.

Torture is an appalling form of violence and one of the most serious human rights infringements. Several key legal instruments ban torture, including the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This ban is absolute, which means that states may not make exceptions to it under any circumstances. Nor does the ban depend on a state ratifying a particular convention or not; it is binding as customary international law on all states in the world.

Sweden must be a driving force in work against torture in the UN and the EU. Sweden agrees with the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment that specific initiatives are also needed to prevent the torture of LGBTI persons.

The death penalty is an unacceptable, inhumane, cruel and irrevocable punishment that has no place in a modern legal system or state under the rule of law. Sweden and the EU will continue work to increase support for the Resolution on a moratorium on the death penalty adopted for the first time by the predecessor of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the UN Commission for Human Rights, in 1997. This involves ongoing and principled dialogue on the application of the death penalty with the aim of urging states that have not yet abolished the death penalty to change their views.

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Illegal deprivation of liberty, forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions cannot be accepted either. They involve not only intolerable suffering for those affected and their relatives but are also an expression of oppression. Sweden will continue to actively support a recurring UN resolution on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and safeguard the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

## 5.3 Access to justice and freedom from corruption

### **The Government intends to:**

- work to ensure that the principles of the rule of law are understood as a principle of governance and a matter that applies to every interaction between the state and individuals
- support capacity-building in terms of regulatory supervision, audits and accountability
- promote transparency, free media and a scrutinising civil society in line with the principles of democracy and the rule of law.

Many poverty and conflict-based social problems such as waste of resources, discrimination and rights infringements can entirely or partly be explained by the rule of law being pushed aside by abuses of power, arbitrariness and corruption.

This is why the Government considers that the principles of the rule of law must always hold sway in encounters between individuals and the State. This is not only the case in relation to the police, prosecution service and the courts but also in encounters with the agencies and other bodies that control the permits etc. – such as identity documents, polling cards, tax documents and education certificates – that determine people's opportunity to live and develop day to day. The rule of law is also central to business and its development, e.g. when it comes to different types of permits, procurement, competition issues and conditions for free and sustainable business.

Technological development in the form of the internet and new media also involves opportunities and challenges. While ideas about freedom and rights can be spread more quickly and more easily than ever before, the privacy of private life must be protected, different forms of criminal activity online combated and attempts by states to use new media for propaganda purposes must be stopped. The principles of the rule of law

play a key role here too, especially for societies where freedom of speech and civil society are limited and threatened by repressive measures.

If the principles of the rule of law are to be exploited to protect democracy and human rights, the institutions of a state under the rule of law must also themselves be protected against manipulation, corruption and other social problems. Opportunities must also exist to demand accountability when representatives of the State are guilty of infringements or corruption. The Government therefore wants attention to be paid to structures for regulatory supervision, audits and effective accountability within the administration and the justice system. Civil society and individual whistleblowers in particular have an important role to play in scrutinising the use of public powers and pointing out when they are abused.

## 5.4 The right to work

### **The Government intends to:**

- work for a Global Deal – a global agreement between capital and labour
- strengthen women and girls' economic empowerment and access to economic resources, including through decent work
- particularly advocate respect for freedom of association, the right to organise and the right to collective bargaining
- work to ensure that states ratify the ILO's core conventions
- work for decent work for all.

Sustainable globalisation and economic development must be based on social justice and improved working conditions. This requires concerted action by the international community. Questions of working conditions, social justice and inequality are not only important causes of strikes, popular protest and social unrest – inequality also reduces opportunities for sustainable growth. Rights on the labour market contribute towards democratic development.

Free trade unions and employer organisations and labour rights are central to this work. Better cooperation between the social partners makes it easier to find common solutions to challenges on the global labour market and contributes towards economic, social and environmentally sustainable development.

The Swedish Global Deal initiative seeks to improve opportunities for social dialogue between employers and employees, aiming to put in place decent working conditions, greater equality, higher productivity and inclusive economic development.

The World Bank's database on legislation with a bearing on women's opportunities to exercise their economic rights shows that globally, there is a large amount of legislation that discriminates against women and thus poses active obstacles to women's economic empowerment.

Development cooperation can create platforms for collaboration between the social partners that help to lift people out of poverty and

Sweden wants to further promote human rights in the workplace, with a focus on the right to unionise and the right to healthy and secure working conditions and women's access to the labour market. Through these rights, the challenges of globalisation can be met and instead used as a positive force to give people the opportunities they need to lift themselves out of poverty. For this reason, there is a need for clearer wording on human rights in international trade agreements and greater opportunities for employees to assert their rights in international fora, for example, as well as stronger economic empowerment and access to economic resources for everyone irrespective of gender.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the UN's specialised agency on employment and labour issues. Its fundamental goal is to combat poverty and promote social justice, employment and better working conditions, and to protect labour rights.

The ILO is the only UN organisation in which governments, employers and employees work together on equal terms. Tripartism is the linchpin of the ILO and lends force and dynamism to the debates, giving the work of the ILO great credibility.

Eight of the conventions adopted by the ILO are counted as and monitored as the ILO's fundamental rights conventions. Through their ILO membership and ratification of the organisation's charter, all member states have an obligation to respect, promote and implement the fundamental rights that are the theme of the eight core conventions. These rights cover freedom of association, the right to organise, recognition of the right to collective bargaining and abolishing all forms of forced labour, child labour and discrimination at work.

The ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization from 2010 highlights the organisation's special responsibility to promote social justice and work under decent conditions in the light of globalisation.

The application of ratified conventions is monitored through regular reporting from the governments of the signatory countries. The reports are examined by independent lawyers on the ILO's Committee of Experts and in particular cases by a (tripartite) committee at the ILO's International Labour Conference.

Serious human rights infringements at work are common. More than 168 million children work and more than half of them, 85 million, are involved in work that is harmful to health. 20 million people are the victims of forced labour. More women and girls are victims than men and boys and a quarter of the victims are children under 18. Different forms of forced labour exist, such as debt slavery, for example.

An estimated 90 per cent of forced labour today is in the private economy.

Employees and sometimes even employers are prevented from joining unions and acting freely. However, despite ratification of the Convention concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize (No. 87) and the Convention concerning the Application of the Principles of the Right to Organise and to Bargain Collectively (No. 98), there are restrictions on union activity, including the right to strike. In

countries that are not democracies, free union organisations and free employer organisations are often banned. Strengthening the rights aspects is therefore important.

Failings at work lead to 2.3 million work-related deaths, 310 million accidents with a non-fatal outcome and 160 million work-related cases of illness a year. Women and men still do not have equal opportunities and conditions on the labour market. Changing this unequal situation is an important part of promoting inclusive, gender-equal and democratic communities and constitutes an important priority for Sweden.

## 6 An integrated approach

### **The Government intends to:**

- pursue a rights-based foreign policy in which all policy areas systematically analyse and integrate a rights perspective in steering documents, decisions, positions and monitoring the work carried out.

Policy coherence is now more relevant than ever. The global challenges that must be tackled, such as challenges facing human rights, and the universal impact of the 2030 Agenda clearly signal the need for more cohesive action across policy areas to contribute towards fair and sustainable global development. For this reason, work for human rights must be integrated and combined with work for democracy and the principles of the rule of law. The three areas are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Human rights are a fundamental part of the definition of the principles of the rule of law as such, while enjoyment of human rights demands institutions that operate under the rule of law. In the same way, guarantees of democratic government are found in the individual human rights themselves and the principles of the rule of law.

Similarly, Sweden's Policy for Global Development (PGD) is a central tool in implementing the 2030 Agenda and meeting its SDGs. The 2030 Agenda demands a cohesive policy and new ways of working in which synergies and conflicts between goals can be highlighted and tackled. The Government's Communication on a policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian aid was submitted to the Riksdag in autumn 2016.

Sweden was one of the first countries in the world to adopt a cohesive policy for global development in the Government Bill Shared responsibility – Sweden's Policy for Global Development (PGD, bill 2002/03:122, Report 2003/04:UU3, Riksdag Communication 2003/04:122), which sees Sweden's contribution towards fair and sustainable global development as a shared responsibility across all policy areas. The Government is currently relaunching the PGD. The relaunch means raising ambitions and involves a knowledge boost within the Government Offices of Sweden. For the first time, all ministries have drawn up internal action plans with concrete goals for working on the

PGD linked to the SDGs in the 2030 Agenda. An inter-ministerial working group has been set up comprising those responsible for the PGD at Head of Department level in all ministries.

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The PGD is to contribute towards all three dimensions of sustainability (economic, social and environmental), be characterised by a rights perspective and be founded on the conditions, interests and priorities of poor people. Sweden is to pursue a rights-based foreign policy. This demands that all policy areas systematically analyse and integrate a rights perspective in steering documents, decisions, positions and in following up the work carried out. It is especially important to analyse the consequences of Swedish decisions and measures for vulnerable groups.

The rights perspective helps to identify areas in which special measures are required to ensure that the effects of Sweden's various decisions are as fair as possible. This renders the individual a subject and bearer of rights rather than the object and target of measures. Analyses must also identify and highlight conflicts between goals within and between policy areas so that a decision can be made on these politically.

In the rights perspective, democracy and human rights are seen as being essential to each other. The rights perspective builds on the common norms that human rights represent. The rights perspective within the PGD can be summed up by the four principles of non-discrimination, participation, openness and transparency and by holding oneself and others accountable.

The PGD is carried out through multilateral and bilateral channels. Normative work in the UN and various multilateral bodies and international financing institutions is important in working to implement the policy. The EU is another central arena for this work.

The foreign missions are an important platform for implementing PGD and are able to contribute key expertise on the combined impact of Sweden and the EU on development in a particular country. When diplomacy, development cooperation and promotion work side by side, there are good opportunities to reinforce synergies and resolve conflicts between goals.

It is therefore of benefit to link work on the UN's convention committees on human rights with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism within the United Nations Human Rights Council, providing a firm foundation on which to implement the PGD.

## 6.1 International sanctions and export controls

### **The Government intends to:**

- work actively to promote human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in the work on sanctions carried out in the UN and the EU
- continue to attach particular weight to respect for human rights in the recipient country when granting permits for exports of military equipment.

International sanctions are an instrument used in international efforts to secure peace and security, and in a number of cases also to promote democracy and human rights. Sanctions involve introducing restrictions on the freedom of action for individuals, states, groups or their leaders through a collective decision by other states with the aim of attaining a change in the behaviour of states and individuals.

The sanctions to which Sweden is party are often decided by the UN or the EU. The EU can decide on restrictive measures within the remit of Common Foreign and Security Policy. They may either be decisions to jointly implement the UN's sanctions or independent decisions. The EU has imposed a number of sanctions that seek to combat human rights violations. These sanctions are implemented via EU Regulations that are directly applicable in Sweden.

The cases often concern arms embargoes and other sanctions that ban the export of equipment that can be used for internal oppression, and sanctions targeting persons holding high office, persons considered guilty of human rights violations, and individuals or units that are undermining democracy in a particular country. Examples of current sanction regimes that *inter alia* seek to combat human rights infringements include sanctions against Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya and Iran. These sanctions are an important instrument in showing that there is a price to be paid for committing human rights violations.

At the same time, Sweden considers that in applying sanctions, the human rights of the individual concerned must also be taken into account, including procedural rights and the right to effective trial before a court. Sweden has been very active on issues regarding the rule of law and the effectiveness of the UN's sanction regimes in the 2000s.

Even in cases where decisions on targeted international sanctions have not been taken, there are certain provisions in Swedish and European legislation that entirely or partly seek to combat human rights violations. Human rights are a central criterion in Swedish guidelines on military equipment exports. Similar criteria are found in the EU's Common Position on exports of military technology and equipment and the UN's Arms Trade Treaty.

The Parliamentary inquiry to review export controls on military equipment (dir. 2012:50) delivered its final report *Skärpt exportkontroll av krigsmateriel* (Tighter controls on exports of military equipment) (SOU 2015:72) in June 2015.

**The Government intends to:**

- draw attention to and help to uphold the right to asylum
- work actively for human rights, democracy, the principles of the rule of law, peaceful conflict resolution and sustainable development to ensure that people are not forced to leave their homes due to conflict or poverty
- work for the development potential of migration for countries of origin as well as destination countries, particularly in terms of combating poverty
- through rights-based and unanimous action diffuse conflicts of objectives/interests within areas such as circular migration, remittances and protection and durable solutions for refugees
- strengthen countries' capacity to tackle migration to the country itself, both by citizens of other countries and by their own citizens returning from another country
- work for a greater focus on migrant children and to safeguard a gender-equality perspective
- work for a more even global distribution of responsibility and contribute towards better forms of global governance and cooperation.

People have always moved within countries and across borders. Today there are approximately 250 million international migrants worldwide, approximately 65 million of whom are refugees. About two-thirds of the world's refugees are internally displaced persons, in other words refugees within their own country.

The direction and the composition of migrant and refugee influx have varied over time. At the moment, for example, we are seeing large groups of people fleeing from and within the Horn of Africa and parts of the Middle East. In many places, we see a growing gap between respect for human rights on the one hand and certain countries' national migration and refugee policy on the other.

In order to safeguard the human rights of migrants and refugees, more policy areas need to work together. Stronger cooperation between countries is also vital. This involves both preventing situations that force people to flee and safeguarding the rights and freedoms of migrants and refugees. Working on migration in foreign policy must therefore be part of policy coherence, taking into account human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law at every stage. Safeguarding respect for the right to asylum and the human rights of migrants and refugees is essential if this is to happen.

As far as Sweden is concerned, it is a priority to work to ensure that all individuals, whether or not they have met the criteria for having their asylum application granted, are treated with respect for their human rights. This in turn requires a functioning system for handling migration, also in terms of returning migrants, which builds on the principles of the rule of law and cooperation at regional and national level. Thus, the

positive effects of legal migration can be strengthened and the negative effects that can follow irregular migration can be counteracted.

Women and children may be particularly vulnerable in a migration context. It is therefore important that guidelines to protect vulnerable migrants highlight the situation of female migrants and the particular vulnerability and the risks that children are exposed to, especially those children who are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

The international system and forms for managing and working together on migration and refugee issues also need to be strengthened to achieve a fairer global distribution of responsibility and thus protect the rights of migrants and refugees more efficiently. The decision to incorporate the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the UN system, which was adopted at the UN's high-level summit on large movements of refugees and migrants on 19 September 2016 is an important step forward on the issue of global migration management.

The 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda play a particular role in this context. Meeting these agreed goals requires more in-depth work to strengthen respect for migrants, and especially for the human rights of migrant workers. Migration aspects in development cooperation must also be strengthened generally and the forms of international collaboration on migration must be improved.

It is important for the Government that international agreements on migration are in line with international law, including EU law.

Guaranteeing the human right to seek asylum and safeguarding refugees' enjoyment of human rights are the responsibilities of individual states. At international level, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a fundamental mandate to work to promote and safeguard protection for refugees in line with the UN Refugee Convention. Sweden supports the work of UNHCR and is one of the largest donors to the organisation. In addition to UNHCR, several international organisations have a mandate to work with and monitor migrants', asylum seekers' and refugees' enjoyment of human rights, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Council of Europe. The Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) has an important role to play in promoting migrants' rights by exchanging experiences that offer an opportunity to improve policy development in this field.

### 6.3 International disaster management

**The Government intends to:**

- ensure that all staff sent by Sweden to join international disaster management initiatives are trained in and aware of the needs and roles of women, men, girls and boys in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- work to safeguard the gender-equality perspective in the EU's civil and military disaster management initiatives, from steering documents and disaster assistance reports to operations in the field.

The purpose of international disaster management is to enable people in conflict and post-conflict situations to live in peace, freedom, safety and justice. These operations must help to strengthen democracy and gender equality, freedom from oppression and violence and increase respect for human rights.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, including the seven follow-up resolutions adopted, forms the international agenda for women, peace and security. The resolutions affirm that greater participation by women is essential for maintaining international peace and security. This applies in work to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Gender equality is an important element in building peaceful societies, whereby focusing on women and girls fully enjoying their human rights is an important part of preventing conflicts. In the same way, environmental and climate work is an important element in combating poverty, building peace and gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming is a fundamental element in the EU's broader security and defence policy objectives.

Work within the remit of OSCE draws on the broad concept of security with respect for democracy, the rule of law and human rights as its cornerstones. Our partnership with NATO builds on shared norms and values on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

## 6.4 Conflicts and international humanitarian law

### **The Government intends to:**

- continue to contribute towards work to improve compliance with international humanitarian law
- draw attention to and counteract sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflicts and other disaster situations
- support the implementation of the EU's guidelines on international humanitarian law
- work to ensure that more states ratify relevant conventions on international humanitarian law, e.g. the additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions.

War and armed conflict continue to plague humanity. The number of conflicts is growing, and they are also becoming increasingly prolonged. Today's armed conflicts have gone from conventional wars between states to conflicts within a state that also involve international and non-governmental actors. These conflicts often shift in intensity and in the number of actors involved. While most conflicts are internal, several of them have clearly become international in nature; external actors are drawn into ongoing conflicts for various reasons, often intensifying the disputes and worsening the already pressing humanitarian situation.

The part of international law that seeks to mitigate the suffering caused by armed conflicts to civilians and combatants – international humanitarian law – thus faces major and complex challenges. Sweden

therefore sees a major need to protect and strengthen compliance with these rules. International humanitarian law regulates how the parties to an armed conflict may conduct warfare and seeks to humanise this. The core of the regulations is the Geneva Conventions and the additional protocols that mainly seek to maintain certain minimum humanitarian requirements that apply to all parties in conflicts and cover all the individuals affected.

These convention-bound rules are also largely considered to constitute customary international law and are thus binding upon all parties in armed conflict. While human rights apply at times of peace and in some cases also during armed conflict or during war, international humanitarian law only applies during war or armed conflict.

Possibly the greatest challenge for international humanitarian law is the lack of respect for it. Compliance has deteriorated as armed conflicts have increased and worsened. Urging states and other actors to comply with international humanitarian law is therefore a priority for Sweden.

The sexual and gender-based violence that exists in many of the world's armed conflicts is another major challenge. This is often systematically and deliberately used as part of a military strategy. Sexual and gender-based violence also has huge consequences beyond the conflict in question and demands immediate action. To meet this challenge, Sweden is working to ensure that victims of these crimes are able to receive restitution through the legal system at international and national level, and that women are able to participate in the application of international humanitarian law.

In parallel with international humanitarian law, recent years have seen the development of international criminal law, with the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a historic breakthrough. Under certain conditions, international criminal law and international humanitarian law also provide an obligation for states to bring individuals to justice under national legal systems for genocide crimes, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Within the remit of work with the ICC, Sweden is involved in addressing how sexual and gender-based violence in conflict can better be prevented and the perpetrators be more frequently brought to justice.

**The Government intends to:**

- improve coherence between trade, business and foreign policy by working actively to ensure that Swedish investments abroad lead to sustainable business and respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.
- increase awareness at Sweden's embassies of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and of sustainable business such that they can support Swedish companies operating abroad on these issues.

The Government considers that business and respect for human rights must go hand in hand and be part of an active sustainable business policy. Improved coherence between trade, business, development and foreign policy is vital to create better conditions for sustainable business and respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law. This may involve questions of decent working conditions, fundamental employee protection and labour rights laid down in the UN's central human rights conventions and ratified by the majority of the states of the world.

Companies that act in line with international guidelines for sustainable business can contribute towards sustainable development, for example through decent working conditions, greater gender equality, anti-corruption, environmental considerations and respect for human rights. Institution-building and capacity-boosting are ways in which development cooperation can improve the playing field for sustainable business in developing countries.

The Government's clear expectations are that Swedish companies are expected to respect human rights in all their operations, in Sweden and abroad. This is particularly applicable in countries in which respect for human rights is poor. This means that the operations of the companies must not cause, contribute towards or be linked to human rights infringements, that they must act to prevent such infringements and attempt to remedy the situation for those affected. The responsibility of companies applies irrespective of the capacity or desire of states to meet their own obligations on human rights. The work must be adapted to the circumstances governing operations and the impact on human rights.

The Government's initiatives in the area are founded on Sweden's national action plan for business and human rights, launched in August 2015. The action plan seeks to translate the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights into practical action. It is also an important part of the Government's heightened ambitions in the area of foreign trade through Sweden's export strategy and in the area of sustainable business, in which the Government submitted a Communication on the new policy (Comm. 2015/16:69 Policy on sustainable business) to the Riksdag in December 2015. It is also an important element in the PGD and in work on the 2030 Agenda.

In the action plan, the Government urges companies to adopt a policy declaration on respecting human rights in their operations, to survey and

control risks in their value chain and to introduce whistleblowing procedures for employees. The Government has also commissioned Business Sweden to increase its support to companies in this area, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized companies. Questions surrounding sustainable business and human rights must also be addressed regarding promotion initiatives and travel by company delegations. The work also includes support to foreign missions to assist Swedish companies on issues concerning sustainable business, including business and human rights.

## 6.6 The environment, climate and human rights

### **The Government intends to:**

- work to ensure that greater attention is paid to the links between the environment, climate and human rights and to pursue issues of democracy, transparency, participation and environmental analysis
- highlight the fact that the problems may be local, national and regional and need to be addressed at different levels
- work actively to increase our capacity to limit the impact of environmental and climate change on the stability and long-term security of regions
- encourage socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development by working to expand the debate on how global investment flows might be directed.

Increasing attention is being paid to the link between climate protection, the environment and respect for human rights, particularly within work for sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda. The initial key point is that a healthy environment is crucial to enjoy human rights. This link was emphasised back at the UN's first Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg reiterated that respect for human rights is a prerequisite for attaining sustainable development.

In the long term, the link between protecting the environment and respecting human rights will become ever more relevant. This is particularly valid for the work being done ahead of time to mitigate the effects of climate change, in which adaptation and emission restriction measures both affect circumstances in which human rights can be exercised. Inversely, respect for human rights can contribute towards successful environmental efforts and management of natural resources.

Climate change threatens economic, social and political development, especially in developing countries. It mostly affects poor people, who are often particularly vulnerable to decreasing harvests, disappearing areas of arable land, higher sea levels, flooding and climate migration, etc. Growing extraction of natural resources and the spread of environmental toxins are other threats. A lack of resources can result in refugee and migration movements which can lead to antagonism and a higher risk of conflict in which the human rights situation in the area deteriorates. In unstable situations, political groups can exploit the situation that has

In several reports, the UN's Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment has shown how people's right to a reasonable standard of living and health is threatened by unsustainable exploitation that also conflicts with democratic governance and principles of responsible business. The rapporteur points out that environmental pollution is a factor that clearly affects enjoyment of human rights, and the reports have shown how the enjoyment of human rights by indigenous peoples has been pushed aside in favour of harsh exploitation of natural resources such as timber, minerals and oil.

In many places economic growth has lifted people out of poverty. At the same time, growth in many countries and towns has not taken place in a manner that is environmentally sustainable, including significant pollution of air and water, that has a negative effect on the environment and worsens people's health and ability to earn a living.

In order to tackle these problems, it is necessary for actions to be cohesive across different policy areas, drawing attention to and tackling the problems that can arise. This also applies to the pollution of air and water that affects people's health and has given rise, for example, to miscarriages, birth deformities and cancer.

Environmental and health problems are often particularly serious when linked to illegal activity, such as logging and mineral extraction, and where disputes arise over the right to land and natural resources. In several regions there are also problems associated with mines and oil wells where exploitation of the resources takes place in parallel with exploitation of women and children for sexual purposes and labour.

Sweden views with particular concern threats and violence against individuals and groups that have drawn attention to pollution and who through meetings and demonstrations have demanded that responsible companies and politicians are brought to justice. The violence and threats limit these people's freedom of assembly and may also constitute infringements of their land rights. They also slow development in the area of democratic government.

Sweden is working to ensure that all countries make the transition towards a sustainable society with low emissions and high resilience to the effects of climate change. Correctly carried out, this kind of transition also has positive effects on economic development and combating poverty, energy security and improved health while safeguarding enjoyment of human rights. Sweden's work to implement the COP 21 climate agreement adopted in Paris in 2015 and the 2030 Agenda must be seen as part of the work for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Women, men, girls and boys are differently affected by the consequences of climate change and scarcity of natural resources. Women and girls are affected by and have to deal with the climate and access to natural resources to a greater extent as they traditionally take responsibility for food production and collecting water and fuel. This work is time-consuming and exhausting and has major consequences for women's empowerment, education, literacy, nutrition, health, economic opportunities and participation in social life and political activities. At

the same time women are vital actors in the work to combat climate change and in working for the sustainable use of resources, as they have great knowledge about food, water and energy systems.

Sweden is working to expand the debate on how global investment flows can be directed to encourage socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development with a considerably smaller input of fossil energy. This also requires that all policy areas take shared responsibility. The rights perspective is central to this work as the environment and climate issue is largely about protecting the right to development and human rights. Sweden must live up to its own undertakings and support developing countries in such ways that they too can adapt to climate change.

## 6.7 Terrorism

### **The Government intends to:**

- strengthen the rule of law nationally and internationally to combat and prevent violent extremism
- work to ensure that the battle against terrorism is conducted with full respect for international law, human rights and the rule of law
- combat countries using terrorism as a pretext for forcing through illegal restrictions.

Protecting and promoting human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law is a central part of work to combat violent extremism and terrorism. Extremism, racism and similar forms of hostility, discrimination and exclusion can be counteracted by encouraging democracy, gender equality, participation and respect for the equal value of all people. Therefore, respecting and protecting human rights and the principles of the rule of law are a fundamental requirement for all counter-terrorism work. This approach runs through every aspect of Sweden's work to tackle violent extremism and terrorism nationally and internationally.

Terrorism threatens international peace and security, national security and individuals' freedoms and rights. Terrorism and violent extremism attempt to undermine and weaken democracy and human rights. Besides the right to life, health and liberty, freedom of speech is also eroded when threats of violence lead to self-censorship, while the right to freedom of assembly is eroded when people cannot risk gathering in public places due to threats of violence. Opportunities for civil society to act and the opportunity for social and economic development are also threatened.

States have an obligation to take action to protect people's rights to life and security, and to prosecute and bring to justice those who are guilty of terrorist crimes. Terrorism must be combated using means acceptable in an open, democratic society under the rule of law and each measure must be proportionate to its purpose, both in terms of new general regulations and the application of these regulations in a specific instance.

Combating terrorist crime therefore sometimes involves making difficult decisions after weighing up various interests and objectives. Respect for freedoms and rights is fundamental to counter-terrorism work and may only be restricted for purposes that are acceptable in a democratic society and only by means of measures that are necessary, appropriate and proportionate.

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However, in many places in the world, anti-terrorism laws have been adopted that disproportionately restrict people's rights. Sometimes, efforts against terrorism entirely or partly serve as a pretext on the part of authoritarian regimes to persecute and prosecute dissidents, to carry out mass surveillance of people's communications, limit political debate and introduce media and internet censorship.

Measures of this type do not aid the fight against terrorism; instead, they risk making it easier for extremist movements to mobilise while undermining work against violent extremism and contributing to the long-term goal of terrorism of weakening human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

Violent extremist groups, networks and individuals use the internet and social media to spread propaganda and other material glorifying violence, violent ideologies and terrorism. It is important to be equipped to encounter and critically question this kind of propaganda and these anti-democratic messages even when they are disseminated online.

Sweden's work to protect democracy from violent extremism is founded on safeguarding the democratic principles on which society rests and the equal value and rights of all people. This makes society more resilient to violent extremism.

Sweden protects human rights as a deeper fight against terrorism in multilateral and bilateral fora. Sweden's policy for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law – and broader development cooperation – is a contribution towards this work in its own right.

## 7 Tools and arenas

### 7.1 Networks, collaboration and dialogue

#### **The Government intends to:**

- be guided in choosing foreign policy tools by the interests of those whose rights need to be defended and promoted
- consistently address human rights in a well-founded manner in foreign policy dialogues and meetings, multilaterally and bilaterally, in a national capacity, in ad-hoc coalitions and through the EU
- provide political and financial support to international institutions that have a watchdog function and use foreign missions as a platform to create better contacts and networks with and between civil society organisations and human rights defenders
- work with like-minded bodies within and outside the EU, and in close dialogue with Swedish civil society and industry for maximum impact
- work for broader cooperation with new, innovative actors, multilateral organisations and international civil society
- combine initiatives in development cooperation, promotion and other policy areas to push issues of human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in new and more effective ways in various projects.

Sweden works on issues concerning human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law across the entire scale – from the most repressive environments and fragile states to well-developed democracies. The rights-promotion situation in the EU and in multilateral bodies such as the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe differs and also changes over time. As challenges increase, it becomes increasingly important to develop methods and adapt tools to an up-to-date view of the current situation and local conditions. Flexibility, sensitivity and creativity are therefore of the utmost importance here.

Networks, alliance-building and multi-partite collaboration to strengthen human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are becoming increasingly important in order to carry out work effectively. This makes diplomatic fieldwork with active network-building even more significant. Strategic partnerships and shared activities are needed throughout the entire international system in order to exert influence regarding prioritised issues and see them gain impact. Regional institutions in general, and the EU in particular, are especially important in this work.

Maintaining broad-based contact with and raising the profile of actors that promote rights in many different sectors of society is essential to Swedish work in this field. The rights perspective, in which cooperation and dialogue are central, is therefore also important in foreign policy. The role of Swedish foreign missions as a platform for dialogue and broad-based cooperation is a central tool for Sweden, as inviting activists and organisations to engage in dialogue and attend seminars and receptions legitimises their activity and reinforces their efforts. Ongoing contact with human rights defenders, e.g. through monitoring court trials, especially in rural areas, is an important area for Swedish diplomats in the field.

When human rights are infringed, public statements and criticism at the highest level are very effective tools in many cases and in other cases the purpose may best be served by a direct and straightforward dialogue with the country in question. In many cases, the tools need to be combined. Swedish action has to be adapted to each specific circumstance and the safety and interests of the individual are paramount. The ongoing values-based political dialogue is central to raising the visibility of and strengthening respect for norms and undertakings on human rights, while Swedish support for international institutions exercising a watchdog function is also important.

Existing dialogue opportunities, especially within the EU, exchanging political visits and international meetings must be used to pursue relevant issues with other states. Top-level political engagement with other countries is of the utmost importance in making effective headway. Official diplomacy opens up broader contact interfaces and new platforms for dialogue and thus constitutes one of the more important tools in conducting a rights-based dialogue on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

Many foreign missions are encountering a growing number of counter-arguments from the representatives of various regimes in multilateral fora and at country level. States that were previously prepared to give signs of fulfilling their international undertakings are now questioning the system as such and reinterpreting, relativising or diluting terms and established norms. This makes greater demands in terms of knowledge, rationality, underlying arguments and legal grounds for the statements and positions put forward.

Recounting the many positive effects that, in Swedish experience, follow on from an open and gender-equal society characterised by the principles of the rule of law and a democratic government is also of value.

Emphasising the importance that human rights, democracy and a functioning state based on the rule of law have had for Sweden's development – from a poor peasant society to one of the world's most innovative and gender-equal countries – can open new doors to dialogue and exchanging experiences, although the value of human rights in their own right must always be at the forefront. At the same time, it is important to assert this with humility and have no qualms about referring to the sometimes lively discussion on respect for human rights found in Sweden too.

## 7.2 Development cooperation

**The Government intends to:**

- conduct development cooperation that prioritises human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law as a goal and a means
- work for development cooperation in human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law that meets the challenges posed in terms of speed, analysis and flexibility
- work to ensure that the rights perspective permeates both Swedish development cooperation and the work run through multilateral actors and the EU
- work to ensure that a rights perspective permeates the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda.

In order to meet the global challenges, Sweden's development cooperation starts out from the perspective of poor people on development and a rights perspective. Democracy and human rights account for by far the majority of Swedish development cooperation.

Swedish development cooperation takes an integrated view of all the different dimensions of sustainability. Strengthening institutions must be an integrated part of development cooperation and contribute towards openness, capacity that is sustainable in the long term and stronger local ownership. It must also facilitate accountability. Functioning institutions are vital if states are to be able to meet their human rights obligations. Stable institutions help to ensure long-term sustainability and strengthen resilience, which in turn can reduce the impact of humanitarian crises. However, long-term institution-building efforts need to be supplemented by opportunities to work on rapid and flexible initiatives geared towards a wide range of actors. The Government is working towards greater flexibility in development cooperation.

It is important that support to civil society and human rights defenders who are under greater pressure is adapted and appropriate in terms of capacity and quantitative results, for example. Support to new actors and informal networks may need to be adapted if administrative capacity is limited.

There needs to be a greater focus on network-building and supporting popular movements and local groups, and on more effective platforms for better cooperation between different actors. Support for cross-border networks between civil society actors and support for regional and local civil society actors, including different types of exchanges, is important. Close dialogue with civil society organisations on the part of the Government can also be highlighted in this context.

Work on pursuing human rights, democracy and rule of law issues in tough environments may demand new ways of working. Long-term work to build up democratic institutions under the rule of law is important to consolidate and fortify ground gained on democracy. Greater use of innovative approaches, both within EU cooperation and through

partnership with multilateral and private actors, for example, can be part of this work. Development cooperation must be better adapted to the political context.

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Human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are essential to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. All the Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda seek to realise the human rights of all people. However, Swedish aims on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are considerably more ambitious than those agreed within the 2030 Agenda.

This Communication guides Sweden's work overall on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law across the whole area of foreign policy, including development cooperation. The overall direction of the whole of development cooperation is steered by the policy framework for Swedish development cooperation, which is then made concrete in budgets and through instructions, strategies and appropriation directions.

## 7.3 Work at country level

### **The Government intends to:**

- work long term through political dialogue with governments and civil society in other countries, in regional and international fora and in development cooperation
- use, strengthen and influence existing tools such as the UPR, the UN treaty bodies and special procedures to better tie in global processes on human rights at country level and to more clearly follow up countries' development
- publish reports on human rights which also address democracy and the principles of the rule of law
- work on country and/or region-specific planning for work to promote human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law
- improve support to foreign missions to enable them to work more effectively for human rights, developing democracy and promoting the principles of the rule of law.

The universal, normative framework for human rights is well developed and also covers support for democracy and the principles of the rule of law, but there are shortcomings in its implementation. The reasons vary but sometimes come down to political influence on the legal process, specific economic interests and a lack of resources and knowledge. Securing the access of poor people to justice is a particular challenge.

The state is always responsible for maintaining respect for human rights. This covers obligations to uphold the rights of the individual, which may demand that certain acts are criminalised with penalties imposed by national law, and ensuring that a functioning legal system is in place for bringing crimes to justice.

The international community can support states in this kind of work by working for access to justice for victims of violence and abuse, for

instance. Sweden is to work for a systematic effort to implement respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law at country level. Long-term planning and developing clear priorities at country level is essential, as is designing work so that it takes into account country-specific challenges and opportunities.

A constructive approach to promoting human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law at country level means applying a combination of initiatives and tools. This may involve issuing statements on individual human rights infringement cases, making statements in disasters, expressing support for vulnerable population groups and organisations and working to strengthen important institutions.

Depending on the situation, such messages may be conveyed, e.g. by representatives of Swedish foreign missions, and this should be done hand in hand with joint EU action. Long-term work, such as ongoing dialogues with countries' governments, strategic cooperation with a wide range of actors and development cooperation, is also involved. Depending on the context, official diplomacy and social media can be important channels for pursuing rights issues.

Global processes concerning human rights must be better linked to country level. Sweden wishes to use work within the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) along with reports by the UN Treaty Bodies and UN Special Rapporteurs as process-focused instruments for monitoring countries' development in affected areas, in dialogue with governments and civil society.

Attention should continue to be drawn to the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and these should be followed up. It is essential to be well informed about countries. Sweden's country-specific reports on the human rights situation in the world's countries will be expanded to also place greater emphasis on democracy and the principles of the rule of law. These reports will also draw even clearer attention to the situation regarding women and girls' enjoyment of human rights.

Improved opportunities to flexibly carry out strategically important, short and rapid initiatives are important for opportunities to have a greater impact at country level. The link between development cooperation and the political dialogue (including the EU's) should be strengthened. It is also important that development cooperation is sufficiently flexible to enable short and rapid initiatives within the remit of a strategy that ties in with development on the ground.

Swedish foreign missions must firmly set out their work to promote human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in their operational planning.

**The Government intends to:**

- work through the EU for cross-regional collaboration with states that share Sweden's and the EU's values and also counteract attempts to undermine, weaken and relativise human rights and their universality in partnership with civil society
- strengthen united action on the part of the EU's Member States and institutions
- work to ensure that human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are protected and promoted in internal and external EU policy
- work within the EU to ensure that human rights and democracy issues, including promoting gender equality and women and girls enjoying human rights, occupy a central role in relations with third countries, including in the political dialogue in strategic steering documents and action plans
- work to uphold the Lisbon Treaty, including human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law internally within the EU
- actively help to ensure that human rights and democracy gain greater space and impact in individual policy areas
- actively work to ensure that the EU's external measures consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, human rights and international law
- work to ensure a stronger rights perspective in the EU's development cooperation.

The European Union (EU) is a central platform for work to influence respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law. Sweden is to work to ensure that the EU continues to be a strong actor for the general validity of human rights, for democracy and the principles of the rule of law. The Treaty of Lisbon states that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The EU is founded on promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law, which are stated as cornerstones for lasting peace, development and prosperity. This commitment forms the basis of all internal and external politics in the EU and is legally binding in line with the Treaty of Lisbon and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The EU's General Affairs Council has established an annual dialogue to improve common understanding of compliance with the principles of the rule of law in the EU. The dialogue is to be based on objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of all Member States, and be impartial and fact based. It is designed so as to supplement and benefit from the expertise of the EU institutions and international organisations, especially the Council of Europe. The dialogue is supplemented by thematic discussions.

Respect for the principles of the rule of law and the fundamental values of the EU are essential to European cooperation and mutual trust. Internal compliance with fundamental democratic principles is necessary to create trust in the EU's external actions. A new Framework was launched in 2014 to strengthen the principles of the rule of law in the EU. The Framework supplements the infringement procedures under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the mechanisms in Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union. The new Framework consists of a structured process in three steps: Commission assessment, Commission recommendation and a follow-up to the Commission's recommendation. A structured exchange of this type was initiated with Poland earlier this year.

One priority for this work should be tightening up on compliance with the principles of the rule of law and clearer peer review of how the EU's Member States are fulfilling their undertakings. It is necessary for the EU's credibility as an external actor in relation to third countries that the EU also has a clearer voice in terms of safeguarding human rights within the Union itself.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights is tasked with gathering and analysing information and data, providing advice in the form of reports and statements, working with civil society and running information activities on the fundamental rights. Sweden has been actively involved in work on the framework programme for 2013–2017 which includes the thematic areas of racism, xenophobia, discrimination, the rights of the child and Roma integration.

Sweden sees the EU as a central actor in global work on human rights. The EU commands important tools in the form of partnership agreements, dialogue, integration of aspects involving human rights and democracy in all parts of the EU's external activities, engagement with other countries, financial support to initiatives and integrating a rights perspective. There are common guidelines in place for how the EU and the Member States are to work for and conduct dialogue on issues such as the death penalty, torture, rights of the child, human rights defenders, rights of LGBTI persons and freedom of religion or belief. The EU conducts formal dialogues on human rights with about 40 states.

In addition, strategies have been drawn up for work to promote human rights for a large number of countries. In 2012 the EU adopted an overarching long-term Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy and in 2015 a second Action Plan was adopted to implement this framework. This extensive action plan runs to 2019. The above view of human rights and democracy is also reflected in the EU's global strategy.

The EU accession process continues to be an efficient tool for reform for countries in Europe's neighbouring area that are currently outside the Union but wish to become members, including in increasing respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law. Each year the European Commission's progress reports by country assess the progress made by candidate countries towards meeting the EU's accession criteria. This acts as a road map for the countries' reform work. Sweden has long been one of the most influential Member States in the EU expansion process. Sweden's support is founded on the conviction

that the EU accession process contributes towards stability, peace and development in Europe in the long term. Conditionality is fundamental for preserving the credibility of the enlargement process. Progress in the process of reform must be rewarded by progress towards EU accession.

The EU's country strategies with shared priorities for the EU's work at local level for human rights and democracy form part of the implementation of the action plans. The country strategies have resulted in more cooperation between EU delegations and the Member States' embassies on human rights and democracy. The Special Representative appointed in 2012 is a central actor in the EU's external human rights efforts. The Special Representative's mandate is to increase efficiency, coordination and visibility of human rights in the EU's foreign relations.

Sweden is to actively help to ensure that human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law gain even greater space and impact in individual policy areas. To this end, Sweden should seek to make more efficient use of the tools that the EU and its Member States have at their disposal to promote and defend human rights, democracy, the principles of the rule of law and international law in their concerted external action.

The EU should develop innovative and flexible methods to meet the growing need for support to individuals and organisations campaigning for freedom, democracy and human rights in repressive states. One such example is the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) that over a brief timespan has established itself as an important actor in the EU's democracy support in its Southern and Eastern neighbourhood. The existing programmes within the EU's democracy support, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), should be adapted in order to be used more flexibly. One example of this is the Human Rights Crises Facility mechanism geared towards vulnerable human rights defenders and the Commission's initiative for a global platform for relocation and providing temporary shelter for human rights defenders at risk.

The EU's Common Trade Policy is a central aspect of the EU's role as a global actor and seeks to strengthen conditions for trade, growth and employment. Human rights clauses are included in all trade and partnership agreements negotiated by the EU, and some agreements also integrate rights established in the ILO's core conventions.

Sweden works for free trade, greater openness and sustainable business and against protectionism, and works to ensure that the EU includes references to sustainable business, including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, in the sustainability chapters of its bilateral and regional trade agreements, investment agreements and partnership and collaboration agreements. Sweden places great emphasis on the way this section of the agreements is drawn up, with the aim of supporting sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

The EU's instruments include Aid for Trade, in other words trade-related economic support that seeks to strengthen opportunities for low-income countries to participate in and benefit from international trade, and can for example help to create institutional conditions for reducing poverty and boosting women's economic empowerment and employee rights. The EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) allows developing countries to pay less or no duties on their exports to the EU.

Countries in the south that have ratified and effectively fulfilled their undertakings under certain international conventions, mainly in the areas of labour law and human rights, can be offered full removal of tariffs through the GSP+ enhanced preferences system.

## 7.5 The United Nations

**The Government intends to:**

- strengthen the UN's role as a global arena for developing norms and monitoring human rights
- help to ensure that, within the remit of its conflict-prevention and peace-building work, the Security Council works to integrate human rights protection and the principles of the rule of law to a greater extent
- emphasise the links between security, development, human rights and the principles of the rule of law
- work forcefully for women and girls' enjoyment of human rights in the United Nations Human Rights Council, and maintain and strengthen the opportunity of civil society to participate in the work of the Council
- actively participate and engage in the UN's Universal Periodic Review and highlight the human rights infringements taking place across the globe
- continue to be constructively involved in the reviews carried out within the scope of the UN's convention committees.

Sweden works within the UN to strengthen the protection of human rights and support decisions that intend to improve the fulfilment of existing obligations. The UN is the only worldwide intergovernmental forum for developing norms and conducting supervision on compliance with human rights. Sweden's work in the UN reflects Sweden's general ambition to increase the role of the organisation and reinforce international human rights initiatives.

The UN Security Council is a strong norm builder whose work is increasingly characterised by the importance of human rights. For example, this applies in conflict-prevention work but also in thematic discussions, such as on the protection of civilians, children in armed conflict or the role of women in conflict. Where possible, Sweden usually co-sponsors proposed Security Council resolutions on these themes. Sweden has also recently signed up to the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians in UN peacekeeping operations. The Security Council has also become involved in supporting democracy and election processes in a number of countries, including through decisions to conduct election monitoring. The United Nations Secretariat's Department of Political Affairs (DPA) whose operations Sweden contributes towards, coordinates the UN's support for elections and electoral processes.

Human rights have come to play an increasingly central role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. The obligation to protect has been

adopted by the Security Council in a number of resolutions. The Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative has strengthened the UN system's measures to prevent large-scale human rights crimes.

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The United Nations Human Rights Council was established in 2006 to replace the former Commission on Human Rights. The main task of the Council is to promote and protect human rights. The Human Rights Council comprises 47 member states, elected for three years. The UN's other member states participate in the Human Rights Council as observers, without the right to vote. The Human Rights Council is the foremost norm-building body on human rights. Sweden will continue to prioritise work within the Council and work to ensure that Sweden remains a clear voice in the Council for compliance with and strengthening of human rights.

Sweden works actively, within the EU and with other states, to counteract attempts to water down, weaken and relativise human rights and their universality. Sweden considers that civil society plays an important role in global work for human rights. The involvement of civil society organisations and their opportunity to influence the work of the Human Rights Council is challenged on a regular basis. Consequently, Sweden works to ensure that civil society's opportunity to participate in the work of the Human Rights Council is upheld and strengthened.

The Council faces a number of challenges, including a growing workload, which means a broad agenda that is difficult to manage. The imbalance between thematic and country-specific initiatives also poses a challenge.

The Council also suffers from political polarisation, which makes it harder to reach agreement on clear and feasible decisions. Nevertheless, the Council remains an important tool in the battle to draw attention to serious human rights violations and protect and strengthen human rights in that it has succeeded on many occasions in shifting positions in normative work thanks to its many Special Rapporteurs, working groups and independent experts who take responsibility for thematic or country-specific questions. Illustrative examples of important progress in the Human Rights Council include the creation of Commissions of Inquiry on North Korea and Syria and Special Rapporteurs for Iran and Belarus.

Through several resolutions the UN Human Rights Council has also highlighted LGBTI persons' need for protection from violence and discrimination in order to attain full enjoyment of human rights. The special procedures of the Human Rights Council have a central role to play in monitoring work in different areas. Sweden will continue to work to see these tools preserved and strengthened. Sweden will also continue to counter attempts to limit the independence of the special procedures and opportunities to act.

The Human Rights Council's best-established instrument in work to promote human rights, democratisation and the principles of the rule of law is Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The review mechanism is used to examine the human rights situation in all the UN's member states. All member states are able to participate in reviewing other countries. Forty-eight countries are reviewed each year, which means that each state undergoes a review every four years. Sweden was first reviewed in 2010 and was reviewed for the second time in January 2015.

The UPR process has created a good basis for comparison and for monitoring countries' development on fulfilling human rights over time. The mechanism allows the Human Rights Council to shed light on the human rights situation in countries that sought to avoid review. Sweden is to work towards greater transparency on the human rights situation through constructive dialogue and in close partnership with civil society through UPR. This applies both to like-minded countries and to countries that demonstrate significant shortcomings in respect for human rights.

The convention committees that monitor states' undertakings under the UN's human rights conventions are another aspect of the UN's human rights review system.

The review system also incorporates an opportunity for individuals to bring individual complaints of human rights violations before the convention committees. Sweden has signed up to the complaints procedures linked to five of the core conventions (ICCPR, CEDAW, CAT, CRPD and CERD).

The Third Committee of the General Assembly has a clear link to the United Nations Human Rights Council. In all essentials the themes of the large number of resolutions negotiated and adopted by the Third Committee and by the Human Rights Council overlap.

## 7.6 The UN's specialised agencies, funds and programmes

### **The Government intends to:**

- consistently defend a rights-based approach and promote the responsibility of UN bodies to call attention to crimes against human rights
- forcefully protect the UNDP's mandate to strengthen the rule of law and democratic government of countries
- work for reform that strengthens the UN system and increases unanimity within the system and with the international financial institutions.

The United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, supports election monitoring in about fifty countries every year and builds institutional capacity in many developing countries to strengthen the rule of law and promote democratic government. Because the UN is unable to overrule the will of host governments, the work is largely founded on cooperation, with the restrictions inherent in such an approach. The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, helps to strengthen the rights of the child in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The work includes combating discrimination and safeguarding education, health and freedom. UNICEF carries out wide-ranging humanitarian work and operates in areas of conflict to give children security despite difficult conditions.

Since its launch in 2010, UN Women, the UN's agency for women and gender equality, has been working to strengthen the position of women and safeguard equal rights for men and women. The work of the United

Since its founding in 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, has been a norm-giving actor in international environmental and climate work and works with UNDP, OHCHR and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment to strengthen human rights through environmental and climate improvements and vice versa.

Sweden is one of the largest donors to the UN's funds and programmes and an active participant in steering operations. In addition to Sweden's core support, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida, contributes towards thematic programme operations, which place great emphasis on democracy and human rights. Sweden conducts dialogue with the UN agencies in boards and through Swedish embassies to compare impressions and assure itself that the UN will put pressure on governments where necessary.

One important trend is that the UN at country level increasingly speaks with one voice and operates concerted programme operations to carry out the global SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. Here, good governance and partnership with civil society must be fundamental elements.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, has a mandate to work on issues concerning freedom of the press and freedom of expression, media development and the safety of journalists in traditional and digital media the world over. Sweden has made a name for itself in UNESCO as one of the countries that has most actively raised the question of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. A Swedish resolution was adopted at the General Conference in 2011 that formed the basis for the first UN report of its kind – World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development. In 2015 Sweden submitted a resolution on increased protection for journalists, which was adopted in consensus by UNESCO's board.

## 7.7 International financial institutions

### **The Government intends to:**

- work with like-minded countries to incorporate human rights in the work of the development banks in various ways
- work to ensure that the development banks continue to prioritise support to strengthen the principles of the rule of law.

Sweden is pushing to ensure that the multilateral development banks work on the basis of a clear rights perspective and is working to urge the banks to take a broader approach to anti-discrimination and also include sexual and reproductive health and rights. With like-minded countries, Sweden is also attempting to incorporate human rights in the work of the development banks in various ways.

The development banks' environmental and social standards for investment projects are one example of Sweden pursuing the question of human rights. The Nordic Trust Fund is a tool set up by Sweden and the

other Nordic countries within the World Bank. It is a fund for promoting human rights in the work of the bank. The World Bank's World Development Report 2017 will address good governance and the importance of strong rule of law. The selection of this particular theme represents a success for Sweden, as a topic that Sweden has been advocating for several years.

The World Bank's Articles of Agreement specifically prohibit the Bank and its officers from interfering in the political affairs of any member or being influenced in their decisions by the political character of the member concerned. Only economic considerations shall be relevant to their decisions.

Human rights are a sensitive issue on the Board of the World Bank as several of the bank's member countries actively oppose the Bank addressing this topic at all. In practice, however, the Bank has long worked on issues that contribute to democracy and the enjoyment of human rights through work in areas such as health, gender equality, education, the environment and climate and institutional reforms to strengthen the principles of the rule of law. Furthermore, the environmental and social standards that the Bank applies to its lending help to ensure that the principles of the rule of law are upheld.

The World Bank launched a review of its environmental and social standards for investment projects in 2012. Having a set of standards with ambitious criteria is one of the World Bank's comparative advantages – this is what makes the Bank's investments socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. In discussing the review of the standards, Sweden has lobbied for a number of issues such as human rights, climate, biodiversity, gender equality and rights for indigenous peoples.

As with the World Bank, the charters of both the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) expressly forbid these banks interfering in the political affairs of member countries. However, in practice, just as with the World Bank, AsDB and AfDB contribute towards the enjoyment of human rights through work in different areas, not least in the initiatives carried out to strengthen public institutions. Their social and environmental standards also help to ensure that the principles of the rule of law are complied with and an independent ombudsman function is available to which individuals or groups can turn with complaints.

In conjunction with a review of the steering document for the social and environmental standards in AfDB, a general reference to the importance of respect for human rights was entered, partly following pressure from Sweden.

## 7.8 The International Criminal Court

**The Government intends to:**

- continue to help to work to end impunity for the gravest international crimes, including through support to a strong, autonomous and independent ICC
- be a strong voice for the rights of victims of crime

- continue to work for greater international cooperation for support to victims of sexual and gender-based violence that may involve crimes against the ICC's Statute and to lower barriers to them enjoying effective legal remedies to obtain restitution
- work for stronger cooperation between the UN and the ICC, partly by ensuring that mandates for peacekeeping initiatives include cooperation with the ICC
- support the implementation of the EU's guidelines on the ICC
- continue to work to ensure that as many states as possible sign up to the Court.

Some acts are so serious that they are always criminal, no matter where they are committed and no matter how the state on whose territory the acts are committed views the acts. Although all states have the right to prosecute and convict perpetrators of the gravest international crimes, historically the people responsible for such crimes have often avoided being brought to justice and victims of crime have not been granted justice.

The task of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is to examine prosecutions against individuals for the gravest international crimes.

The Court currently has the right to judge genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. By ending the impunity of individuals for international crime, and working for the right of victims of crimes to restitution, the ICC promotes fostering and respect for international humanitarian law and the universality of human rights.

The Court is able to bring to justice crimes committed by citizens of a State Party or crimes committed on the territory of a State Party. The Court can also have the right to pass judgment on others, if the UN Security Council refers a situation to the Court, as in the cases of Darfur and Libya. The Court can only try crimes committed after the entry into force of the Rome Statute in 2002.

124 states have ratified the Rome Statute at the present time. The Court's workload has increased in recent years and its operations span the globe. It is currently conducting nine preliminary examinations and has ten situations under investigation. Trials are in progress in seven cases, three of which are in the preliminary phase, and four are at the pre-trial stage.

Sweden actively contributes to the ICC's work, partly through political support in international contexts and partly through financial support. In addition to an annual grant, Sweden contributes, for example, through support to the ICC's Trust Fund for Victims and is a member of the ICC's Assembly of States Parties involved in particular issues. Sweden is working to see as many states as possible signed up to the Court.

The International Criminal Court's operations are founded on it being a complement to national courts and only taking over when national legal systems lack the will or the capacity to carry out an investigation and bring perpetrators to justice. The grave international crimes over which the International Criminal Court has jurisdiction are often complex and difficult to investigate. It is therefore important that states have adequate

legislation and capacity to carry out investigations and bring perpetrators to justice.

Sweden works for greater international cooperation on this issue and has particularly focused on exchanging experiences on strategic measures at national level to strengthen victims of sexual and gender-based violence. The rights of crime victims continue to be in focus.

Sweden continues to actively work to ensure that states and international organisations fully comply with the ICC so that the Court is able to fulfil its mandate and end impunity for perpetrators and provide restitution to victims.

The work of the Court is sometimes challenged, and certain states whose leading holders of power have been prosecuted have been particularly vocal in their criticism.

Sweden is to continue to work for the principles of combating impunity for grave international crimes and equality before the law no matter where the crime was committed or by whom. These principles are fundamental in the dialogue with the African Union and ICC-critical African governments. Sweden and the EU should continue to carefully consider in this dialogue how and by whom messages are put across and how support for civil society and actors for justice can be designed to promote relations with the ICC. Sweden will continue to work to safeguard the integrity and independence of the court.

## 7.9 OSCE, the Council of Europe and the Nordic Council of Ministers

### **The Government intends to:**

- continue to strengthen and support the independent institutions within the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the mandates of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner for National Minorities
- continue to be an important actor in OSCE, particularly in questions of freedom of expression and freedom of the media
- have a strong presence in the Council of Europe and its various institutions and actively encourage efforts for the organisation's core values
- act as a driving force ensuring that member states implement judgements of the European Court of Human Rights
- use the Nordic platform to supplement work in the EU
- support free and independent media, with a particular focus on Russian media.

*OSCE's unique added value lies in the fact that the organisation clearly asserts that respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law are fundamental criteria for lasting, sustainable peace and security in Europe. All 57 of OSCE's participating states have made politically binding commitments to comply with fundamental freedoms and rights, uphold the principles of the rule of law, build and preserve*

Political accountability is exerted on an ongoing basis within OSCE's Permanent Council, at the annual Human Dimension Review Conference, at a number of thematic supplementary meetings and at regular meetings of the Human Dimension Committee, and forms part of Sweden's and the EU's values-based dialogue with the countries in the region.

OSCE's three independent institutions are particularly important instruments in this respect – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) all have an important mission in helping OSCE's participating states to fulfil their commitments.

The institutions also have a particular role to play as conflict-prevention instruments. This is particularly true of HCNM, whose main task is to identify and counteract ethnic tension that could jeopardise peace, stability or relations between OSCE's participating states at an early stage. OSCE's operational presence in the field is of major importance, seeking as it does to support democratic development and strengthen human rights in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, Central Asia and the Western Balkans.

Sweden supports, politically and financially, both OSCE's institutions and its operations in the field. Support to the institutions is particularly relevant in the light of deliberate attempts from certain participating states to weaken and hinder the work of the institutions. This is especially an issue for RFoM's mandate and ODIHR's election monitoring work. Election observation initiatives are an important part of Swedish support for democracy and their aim is to support the implementation of free, fair and transparent elections. ODIHR's election monitoring methodology is internationally recognised and helps to ensure that election processes have legitimacy, live up to democratic standards and provide an opportunity to document injustices and electoral fraud.

Support for RFoM is particularly relevant in the light of the worrying trend seen in several OSCE countries towards restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of expression. The focus of RFoM's work is issues concerning the safety of journalists, including the specific threats faced by female journalists online, freedom of the press, internet freedom and questions concerning media freedom in conflict. RFoM's work is also an important tool in countering propaganda, persecution of dissidents and legislation that encourages self-censorship and impunity for attacks on independent journalists and opinion formers.

In its capacity as the EU's coordinator for freedom of expression and media freedom issues at OSCE in Vienna, Sweden is also working actively to move questions concerning freedom of expression, media freedom, freedom of association and freedom of assembly further up the OSCE agenda. Sweden is also a driving force in strengthening civil society involvement in OSCE work. This work is run taking into particular account the tougher repression in parts of the OSCE region in

which some states are acting so as to restrict the opportunities of civil society to operate freely.

The main task of the *Council of Europe* is the same as when the organisation was founded in 1949: by protecting the rights of the individual, the organisation is to contribute towards peace, stability and security in Europe. Today all European states are members with the exception of Belarus, i.e. a total of 47 countries. The focus is on three core areas: promoting human rights, democratic government and the principles of the rule of law. The European Convention on Human Rights is a clear shared set of values and provides a normative basis for cooperation within the organisation.

On top of this there is the unique role played by the European Court of Human Rights in monitoring that the member states fulfil their commitments under the Convention and its authorisation to issue legally binding judgments. The Committee of Ministers also has an important task in monitoring that the states affected take the measures that are necessary to implement judgements issued.

Under the Convention, the Court is expressly authorised to order that damages are paid to individuals. In some cases, a state may need to introduce wide-ranging reforms in order to abolish and prevent continued human rights violations. All in all, this produces one of the most effective regional systems for protecting human rights in the world, and the importance of the court for positive developments in the field of human rights in Europe can hardly be overestimated.

However, the system is not without its problems. The workload of the Court was problematic for many years but fortunately the situation looks considerably brighter today. Nevertheless, there continues to be reason for Sweden to work actively to strengthen both the Court and respect for its decisions in Member States, which is wavering in some places. This is vital to the credibility of the monitoring system in both the short and the long term.

The Council of Europe and the EU share fundamental values and since signing a Memorandum of Understanding in 2007, cooperation between the two organisations has intensified, in terms of quality as well as quantity.

Contributing factors in this regard are firstly the more in-depth EU human rights agenda, which was accentuated by the Treaty of Lisbon, and work to bring about the EU signing up to the European Convention on Human Rights. Meetings and cooperation on human rights issues also take place between the Council of Europe, OSCE and the UN.

The European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission) is an important instrument in strengthening respect for the core values of the Council of Europe, and is also known and respected beyond Europe. The Commission offers assistance and scrutiny of ongoing legislative processes in member states, mainly in the field of constitutional amendments. It has played a significant role through its scrutiny of controversial processes in Hungary and Poland and of legislative reform in Ukraine. Here, it is also worth mentioning the Council of Europe's extensive programme operations in countries in need of support to develop administration and a legal system, where the EU is a vital financial donor.

The Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe performs another important function in promoting and protecting human rights. The Commissioner's mandate includes regularly paying visits and drawing attention to human rights concerns in member states. Reports are published following the visits, drawing conclusions and making recommendations. In such cases, the Commissioner has focused on the enforcement of the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. The Commissioner has also exercised the authority to enter as a third party in cases before the European Court of Human Rights.

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The areas in focus have included anti-Roma discrimination, LGBTI persons' rights and protecting the rights of asylum seekers. The focus of the Council of Europe's work on human rights includes gender equality and the rights of LGBTI persons, matching Swedish priorities. There is a multi-annual gender-equality strategy and a Committee charged with tasks such as promoting the implementation of the strategy. More and more states are ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) which Sweden ratified on 1 November 2014 and which is monitored by GREVIO.

A new strategy on the rights of the child for 2016–2021 has been adopted and is now supported by an implementing committee. Within the Council of Europe there is also an ongoing ambition regarding employees' rights and social rights, and a strengthening of the European Social Charter that Sweden has adopted. Here, too, there is a monitoring mechanism in the form of the European Economic and Social Committee.

The continued work of the Council of Europe on behalf of national minorities and regional or minority languages continues. This constant process is fundamental to a Europe enriched by cultural and linguistic diversity. The monitoring mechanisms that safeguard compliance with the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages help to protect the rights of national minorities across Europe.

Sweden is an active member of the *Nordic Council of Ministers*, which works on human rights and democracy in its local area. The Council has offices in all the Baltic countries and since 1995 has carried out operations to strengthen democracy and human rights via its offices in North-West Russia.

A considerable part of this support has gone towards exchanges, building networks and transferring knowledge. Activities at the offices in North-West Russia were halted in 2015 due to the Russian Ministry of Justice's decision to register the office on the list of non-governmental organisations that act as "foreign agents". In addition, the Nordic Council of Ministers has launched a new Russia Programme continuing the operations previously carried out in North-West Russia.

## 7.10 Regional institutions

Sweden is to draw attention to and support regional organisations that are working, on the basis of their own regulations, to strengthen human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

### 7.10.1 Sub-Saharan Africa

#### **The Government intends to:**

- work to strengthen the African governance structure through greater capacity support and strengthen relations with the African peace and security structure
- highlight support for implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 and follow-up resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, women's mediation in conflict, and women and civil society's influence and meaningful participation in peace processes
- emphasise the importance of normative instruments being ratified by the AU's member states and work to strengthen cooperation between the AU Commission and the AU's member states
- draw attention to the issue of sustainable business within the remit of promotion in Africa.

Africa currently has a relatively well-developed structure of regional norms and institutions for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

Several important agreements on democratic governance and human rights have been adopted by the African Union (AU). At the summit in 2011 these agreements were gathered together in the African Governance Architecture (AGA). AGA is an important structure for linking together existing instruments, institutions and initiatives within the AU. Its purpose is to improve the efficiency of issues concerning democracy, governance and human rights in Africa. Promoting democratic governance and human rights is a central aspect of the EU-Africa partnership and one of five prioritised areas.

Sweden and the EU are working towards all African Union member countries ratifying and carrying out existing undertakings and agreements, particularly the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. These are guiding documents in protecting human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in Africa. The work is also supported by important mechanisms such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council and the African Peer Review Mechanism.

In Africa there are also a number of strong civil society actors, including networks of women and men human rights defenders, advocates, etc. working to uphold respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law. The work can be focused on assisting and protecting victims of human rights violations and tackling gender-based and other discrimination that often underlies violence

A close and trusting dialogue with the African Union and other regional organisations drawing on the regulatory structure of these organisations themselves is key to pursuing issues such as human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law in Africa. The role of the region in putting pressure on non-democratic leaders can be significant.

## 7.10.2 Asia and Oceania

### **The Government intends to:**

- work to encourage regional mechanisms for accountability and access to justice that live up to international norms for human rights, in Asia
- work to abolish the death penalty, end torture and impunity and promote the principles of the rule of law
- support and protect human rights defenders and other agents of change in Asia to strengthen democracy and human rights, including freedom of speech
- work to increase awareness of the link between human rights and environmental and climate change
- be a driving force for the EU playing an active role in ASEAN
- promoting the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in relation to sustainable business within the remit of promotion in Asia, including within the remit of the MoU with China on CSR.

Asian regional collaboration looks different in different parts of the region. Strong regional institutions are lacking, complicating collaboration. There is also a lack of regional instruments to protect human rights.

The UN's international mechanisms therefore play a particularly important role in Asia. This is seen firstly in the national human rights institutions that exist in the countries and the networks that these institutions form between themselves and civil society, and secondly through the UN's Universal Peer Review (UPR) mechanism that is a key platform for highlighting difficult issues on human rights regionally and globally. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' regional offices play an important normative, protective and supervisory role for human rights and is important in protecting civil society actors. One example of a sub-regional institution which has potential to exert influence, were it to be strengthened, is the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), established under ASEAN 2009 to advocate for human rights in line with international standards. The Commission has drawn up a Human Rights Declaration that entered into force in 2012. Another example is the Asia Pacific Forum (APF) of National Human Rights Institutions, which is an independent regional forum comprising 22 national human rights institutions. APF seeks to strengthen the capacity of members to investigate and report human rights violations and their capacity to hold governments accountable for

all violations. Regional civil society organisations play a central role. One example is the regional organisation Forum Asia, which, albeit with limited capacity, lobbies both ASEAN and individual states. They also provide support for activists under tough pressure, providing breathing space and competence-building networks. Another example is the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), which monitors compliance with international norms and helps to strengthen the competence of the legal system. Yet another important actor in the region is the pan-regional civil society organisation the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), which is considered to be an important platform for support initiatives specifically directed towards women and girls and for lobbying work nationally and within the UN. UN Women has a normative role in work to strengthen gender equality in the dialogue with governments and regional intergovernmental actors.

Private industry and operations by international investors exert considerable influence on human rights in parts of the region. Dialogue and influence for greater social, environmental and economic accountability can have direct impacts on the conditions under which people live and respect for human rights.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is an important change actor in Asia that, although it lacks a mandate to work on human rights, has major opportunities to influence development in a positive direction. It can do this partly by strengthening institutions for democratic administration under the rule of law and free from corruption but also through compliance with environmental and social standards in investment projects, where these standards include a reference to the importance of respecting human rights, including the ILO's core conventions and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) will potentially also be able to exert influence once it is up and running.

The momentum in the region on implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change can be used to increase the focus on human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law as important conditions for attaining the goals.

### **7.10.3 Europe and its surrounding area**

**The Government intends to:**

- continue to support national and regional organisations working to promote human rights and helping to boost the capacity of agents of change and civil society
- continue initiatives to strengthen human rights, democracy and the principle of the rule of law in the region, partly through support to civil society, free media, journalists and grant operations
- work for continued strong EU engagement in the Eastern Partnership and emphasise the central role of values in the countries' reform work, including giving greater priority to gender-equality questions
- highlight the importance of initiatives on freedom of the media and freedom of expression

- draw attention to the issue of sustainable business in promoting Swedish business in Europe and its surrounding area.

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Sweden provides extensive support to democratic development in the region, including strengthening the principles of the rule of law and human rights. Civil society has an important role in developing democracy and Sweden, including through Sida, has contributed support for initiatives that seek to strengthen civil society in the region. Reduced corruption and citizens' stronger trust in agencies, especially within the legal system, are other key areas. In the region, support is provided, for example for training journalists, but also to gender equality projects and initiatives related to LGBTI persons, while grants are awarded to encourage youth exchanges.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a central tool for the EU in the region and Sweden is working for continued strong EU engagement in the Eastern Partnership. The EU's relations with these countries depend on progress on reforms. Values issues such as human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law, plus gender equality, are central to attaining sustainable results for reform work and continue to be a priority.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has important field presence in the region in terms of support for democratic development and strengthening human rights. The Representative of Freedom of the Media (RFoM) also plays a central role. Initiatives to support free media and journalists are important elements in promoting democratic development. Free and independent media are the best tool against propaganda and disinformation.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is an important forum for cooperation with the countries in its neighbouring area, especially on protecting children against violence and sexual exploitation.

## 7.10.4 Middle East and North Africa

**The Government intends to:**

- constantly emphasise that the EU's interests in the MENA region include promoting human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law
- continue to support national and regional organisations that work to promote human rights
- continue to support capacity building initiatives to strengthen the institutions of the rule of law and transitional justice
- highlight support for implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 and follow-up resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, women and civil society's influence and meaningful participation in peace processes, especially in Syria
- work for continued and expanded exchanges between the OIC and the EU, who jointly signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2015
- continue to defend the principle of deepening relations further with the countries in the region that have higher ambitions and are making the greatest progress on reform
- draw attention to the issue of sustainable business within the remit of promotion in the MENA region.

There are important partner organisations in the region. The Arab League, a culturally uniform association comprising 22 member states, issued a joint declaration on the importance of human rights – political and civil rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights – in 2014. The declaration also distances itself from extremism and agitation. In its capacity of a joint Muslim body with 57 member states and 3 observers, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is a politically relevant discussion partner for trust-inspiring dialogues with the Muslim world.

Relevant regional mechanisms include the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which is a central tool for the EU. An updated ENP with a stronger focus on economic interests and stability should not mean a lesser focus on promoting the EU's values, including human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law. A high degree of integration and beneficial association agreements or allocations within the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) mean high demands in terms of respect for international law including human rights, and for democracy and the rule of law. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is a regional mechanism for questions of common interest, including on development and stability in the area, and cross-border issues concerning human rights, conditions for women and enterprise.

Another interesting initiative in the region, which includes Sweden among its ten largest donors, is the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC). UNAOC is a dialogue initiative that seeks to build bridges and interfaces between different cultures, civilisations and religions. There is a particular focus on dialogue between the Islamic world and the West. In practical terms, UNAOC carries out projects with

## 7.10.5 North America, Latin America and the Caribbean

### The Government intends to:

- continue to support the strengthening of democracy, the rule of law and protection for human rights in Latin America, partly through support for civil society, the UN and the OAS system for human rights
- continue to support government initiatives, national and regional civil society organisations working to promote human rights
- include new actors, including industry, to draw attention to these issues and sustainable business in Latin America.

Through its regional human rights system, the regional Organization of American States (OAS) has played a particularly relevant role in terms of democracy, human rights and transitional justice in Latin America. OAS' inter-American system for human rights is a well-established and important regional human rights system that monitors that OAS' 35 member states meet the obligations laid down in the American Convention on Human Rights. OAS consists of a Commission and a Court and carries out country visits, issues orders on security measures for threatened human rights defenders, submits thematic and country-based reports, conducts public inquiries and gives advice to OAS' political bodies.

Through Sida Sweden has contributed financially to the Commission's Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. Swedish civil society organisations have supported the human rights organisation, Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) that helps national organisations to present cases to the Commission.

The UN has made and continues to make important contributions to peace, human rights and the rule of law in many countries in Latin America.

The in many areas strong and vital civil society has also played a vital role in strengthening democracy and protecting human rights in the region. It continues to have an important role to play, especially where shortcomings have been demonstrated or respect for human rights is under threat. Sweden also provides support for protection for human rights defenders and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Government has also adopted a new, ambitious sustainable business policy. One example of this is Sweden and Chile's current Memorandum of Understanding on sustainable business signed in 2012. Since it was signed, a number of activities in the area have been carried out, including a seminar on gender equality.

## 7.11 International organisations and networks

### **The Government intends to:**

- work to ensure that IDEA remains a central and relevant actor on democracy issues by exploiting its unique skills and experiences to meet global democracy challenges
- continue to be involved in the Freedom Online Coalition and work to ensure that the coalition is used as an effective instrument for coordinating political positions in multilateral fora
- actively participate in cooperation within Community of Democracies with the aim of advancing the democracy agenda and building up a broad base for pursuing democracy issues.

### **7.11.1 International IDEA**

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) is an independent intergovernmental organisation founded following a Swedish initiative in 1995 as a resource and knowledge centre for democracy issues in general and electoral processes in particular. IDEA remains the only international organisation whose operations solely focus on contributing towards sustainable democratic development globally by spreading comparative knowledge and experience of democracy.

Its operations are an important complement to the work on democracy that Sweden carries out bilaterally and multilaterally and as a host country of IDEA, Sweden is well placed to exploit synergies with other forms of democracy support and help to strengthen IDEA's position as a global actor on democracy issues. IDEA is a strategic partner for Sweden that carries out relevant activities in relation to both Swedish priorities and local contexts, has a valuable network and has major international credibility and legitimacy. IDEA's work to support deeper democracy is particularly important in the light of the fact that the advantages of democracy as a form of government have started to be questioned in many countries.

### **7.11.2 Freedom Online Coalition**

Founded in 2011, the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) is a coalition of countries that seeks to improve cooperation against human rights violations online, improve coordination and dialogue in international fora, support bloggers and others in repressive environments and strengthen dialogue with business on the responsibility of corporations for respecting freedom online. The initiative behind the coalition came from the Dutch government. Sweden was one of the 14 founding members.

The countries in the alliance coordinate positions ahead of meetings in a UN context and issue joint statements. A number of informal coordination meetings are held every year, within bodies including OSCE, UNESCO, the UN General Assembly and the International

Telecommunication Union (ITU). Sweden has found it particularly valuable to coordinate and work with others to embed positions on rights and new technology in various international fora. Skr. 2016/17:62

### **7.11.3 Community of Democracies**

Community of Democracies (CoD) is an intergovernmental network formed in 2000 between foreign ministries in democratic countries with the aim of bringing together governments, civil society and the private sector on the shared goal of promoting democracy and strengthening democratic norms and institutions worldwide.

CoD is an important platform for initiatives that promote democracy among like-minded countries, while the organisation is also inclusive and strives to break up the locked positions that often arise in the democracy debate by positively engaging countries that do not normally drive democracy issues. CoD is also an important instrument in Sweden's work to strengthen the role of the democracy agenda in general within foreign policy, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Civil society organisations play an active role in the work of the organisation, giving it a broad and unique base.

## Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Extract from the minutes of the Cabinet Meeting, 8 December 2016

Present: Prime Minister Löfven, chair, and Ministers Lövin, Wallström, Baylan, Bucht, Hultqvist, Regnér, Andersson, Hellmark Knutsson, A Johansson, Bolund, Damberg, Bah Kuhnke, Strandhäll, Fridolin, Wikström, Eriksson, Linde, Skog, Ekström

Rapporteur: Minister Wallström

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The Government adopts Communication 2016/17:62 Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer i svensk utrikespolitik