



PERMANENT MISSION OF SWEDEN

STATEMENT

BY

SWEDEN

State Secretary Mr Christer Hallerby
Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality

40th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
Against Women (CEDAW)

Geneva, 25 January 2008

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25 January 2008

Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality

**Introductory statement held by the State Secretary Mr Christer Hallerby,
Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, Sweden, at the 40th session of
the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**

Madame chair,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is an honour for me and the Swedish delegation to present Sweden's combined sixth and seventh report.

This year, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights celebrates its 60th anniversary, we must remind ourselves that the work to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms can never stop. All member states of the United Nations must continue to take strong actions to fulfil the commitments we made 60 years ago.

All forms of discrimination are obstacles to democracy. The basic principle is simple: every person, regardless of sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability or cultural and religious traditions, is of equal value and dignity - and must be able to enjoy human rights. All people must have equal opportunities in all areas of society.

Since the report was submitted to the Committee, we have had elections in Sweden and a new Government came into office in October 2006.

A new ministry was formed: the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality. We are responsible for issues such as gender equality, integration, human rights, democracy and national minorities.

The Government's aim is to counteract and change systems that preserve the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men. A society where women and men share power and influence, in all

areas, is a better society, with better prospects for development and growth.

Even though considerable advances have been made in promoting equality between women and men in Sweden we still have a lot to do. A gap between women's and men's opportunities to shape society and their own lives still persists.

One of the new Government's first measures was to substantially increase the budget for gender equality policy. We decided on a tenfold increase from approximately EUR 4 million to 40 million yearly. Along with other measures taken, this new money, has greatly improved the possibilities of addressing the challenges that still remain in Sweden.

The Government:

- has adopted an action plan to combat men's violence against women, violence and oppression in the name of honour, and has earmarked EUR 80 million over the next three years for implementing measures;
- has announced a vigorous initiative to promote women's entrepreneurship in the 2007 Budget Bill, approximately EUR 10 million yearly in addition to the 40 mentioned above;
- has allocated resources for further research in the area of women's health and
- has appointed an inquiry to review current career structures in higher education institutions.
- Moreover, the Abortion Act has been amended so that a woman no longer has to be a Swedish citizen or resident in Sweden to have an abortion.

Members of the Committee,

I would now like to describe more fully these and other major initiatives taken by the Government during its first year in office.

Gender mainstreaming is the Government's main strategy for achieving gender equality. Sustainable change of decision-making processes can only be achieved by long-term strategic work to integrate the gender perspective in all relevant policy areas. But this does not rule out the use of special measures or specific legislation to protect women and girls from discrimination. On the contrary, special measures can lay the foundation for far-reaching and sustainable changes in institutions and society as a whole.

Many of the institutions and services of the welfare state are to be found at the local and regional levels. Local and regional authorities are responsible for a major part of the basic services that influence people's everyday lives such as schooling, childcare, healthcare and care of elderly. It is therefore important not only that national government and national authorities apply gender mainstreaming, but also that local and regional authorities have a gender equality approach in their activities. Therefore, the government recently allocated EUR 10 million to promote gender mainstreaming in local and regional authorities over the coming years. The resources will be used for development work in local and regional authorities, for staff development and training, for the development of management systems etc.

Having a vigorous and effective legal framework is of vital importance in combating discrimination against women.

This spring, the Government will put forward an Anti-Discrimination Bill to the Parliament, which will include discrimination on the grounds of sex. We will propose a new more comprehensive and cohesive law against discrimination.

Current discrimination legislation is a patchwork of laws and statutes, developed over the years. In the new Act these different laws will be merged into one single Anti-Discrimination Act, covering seven grounds of discrimination: sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic background, religion or other religious beliefs, disability, and age.

The Act will apply to most areas of society, such as working life, education, goods, services and housing, social services, the social insurance system, health care and national military and civilian service.

In line with the legislative changes, the Government will propose that the current four Ombudsmen are merged into a single national authority, called the Ombudsman against Discrimination. The new Ombudsman will exercise supervision of all anti-discrimination legislation, including sex discrimination. This will ensure more effective and powerful monitoring of compliance with the Act.

The Bill will also underline that there should be a cost for discriminating. The damages for discrimination will be substantially increased.

Members of the Committee,

When we discuss gender equality we cannot stay silent about the most extreme forms of oppression: men's violence against women and girls. It pains me to say that, despite all the laws and programmes that Sweden has put in place, violence against women is still a severe problem. Taking action against and preventing this form of criminality and improving ways of supporting victims is of high priority for the Swedish Government.

Since our last dialogue with the Committee in 2001, Sweden has strengthened work to combat men's violence against women. New legislation on sexual crimes, improved training for professional groups and better support for victims are examples of measures taken.

In November 2007, the Swedish Government presented an action plan to combat men's violence against women, violence and oppression in the name of honour and violence in same-sex relationships. The plan includes 56 measures, and the Government is allocating a total of approximately EUR 80 million over three years to implement these measures.

The measures in the action plan are grouped in six areas:

- protection and support for victims,
- preventive measures,
- enhanced quality and effectiveness in the judicial system,
- measures targeted on the perpetrator,
- greater cooperation between the actors affected, and
- increased knowledge.

An important part of the action plan is to combat violence and oppression in the name of honour. Specific knowledge and sometimes special routines are needed, for example in police investigations, risk assessments and the work of social services. This form of violence is collective in its character, meaning there is often more than one perpetrator, primarily men and boys, but other women and girls might also participate.

Overall, the action plan gives attention to circumstances and situations that make women especially vulnerable to being subjected to violence, for example women with disabilities, women with abuse problems, immigrant women, national minorities and elderly.

I would like to highlight some concrete examples of measures in these six areas.

1. In the area protection and support for victims
 - The Social Services Act has been strengthened so that the duty for the municipalities to provide support and assistance for victims of crime is stated more clearly than before.
 - A national programme for treatment of victims of sexual crimes will be established in the health service.

2. In the area of preventive measures
 - A virtual youth clinic will be established on the Internet.
 - The Government is also allocating resources for a safer urban environment.

3. In the area of enhanced quality and effectiveness in the judicial system
 - An education programme about enhanced treatment for rape victims or victims of other sexual abuse will be designed for the police authorities, the Prosecution Authority and the courts.

4. To put an end to men's violence against women in a long term - perspective, measures aimed at the perpetrators are crucial.
 - All men convicted of violence against women will be offered treatment programmes.

5. The fifth area in the action plan is greater cooperation between the actors affected.
 - The county administrative boards have been given an assignment to support and coordinate regional work to combat men's violence against women.
 - Local cooperation at municipal level will also be stimulated.
 - The Government also intends to build a national model for investigating cases of men's violence against women.

6. The last of the six areas in the action plan is increased knowledge.
 - The Government intends to start a scientific programme focusing on men's violence against women, violence and oppression in the name of honour and violence in same-sex relationships.
 - Education for head-teachers and staff in youth centres will also be developed.

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Members of the Committee,

The Swedish Government views prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes as a serious obstacle to achieving equality between women and men. This problem must be addressed by both judicial and social measures, with a focus on combating the demand for sexual services. The Swedish Government is preparing actions to prevent and combat prostitution and trafficking in persons for sexual purposes.

The Swedish law prohibiting the purchase of a sexual service is an important factor in preventive work to combat the demand for trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children. It is important to stress that the law should be seen as a support for the work being done by social services. Criminalisation can never be more than a supplementary element in the efforts to reduce prostitution and cannot be substitute for broader social exertions

An evaluation of this law is planned for 2008.

Members of the Committee,

Promoting equal economic independence between women and men is a fundamental part of gender equality policy.

Labour market participation among women is high in Sweden. In general, neither women – nor men – are “forced” to choose between having children and having a job. Childcare and paid parental leave (parental insurance) make this possible.

Although labour market participation is fairly equal between women and men, many more women than men work part-time. Having the opportunity of part-time work can facilitate the every-day life of women and men with small children. However, for various reasons, many women tend to work part-time for long periods during their working life. This affects women’s salaries, career opportunities and pensions and thus undermines equal economic independence between women and men.

At the beginning of 2007 the Government introduced an earned income tax credit. This tax reform will make work pay. It aims specifically to provide an incentive for part-timers to go up to working full time.

Along with measures aimed at employers, this will result in a decrease in part-time work among women.

Another major gender equality issue is the gender pay gap which continues to be a difficult problem. It is important to note that pay is negotiated in the labour market, where collective bargaining is an important instrument. The Government must not intervene in this process. However, there are other ways to influence developments for example, by promoting dialogue and debate, by gathering and publishing statistics disaggregated by sex, etc.

Another way is to set an example. In 2007, the Government set up a target stating that the unwarranted pay gap between women and men in the state sector should be eliminated by 2010.

An important reason for the gender pay gap in the state sector is that women do not reach high-level positions to the same extent as men do. Therefore, the government has commissioned the Swedish Administrative Development Agency (Verva) to set up a programme on women's career development in the state sector.

Creating more job opportunities and increasing the number of business enterprises are issues of high priority. There is clearly scope for more women entrepreneurs in Sweden. About a quarter of all companies in Sweden are run by women, and women's share of business start-ups was 35 per cent in 2006. More women starting and running companies would benefit the economy and increase the number of women who form and take part in the informal networks from which top management are recruited.

The Government has initiated a number of actions in the past year to make it simpler and more profitable to run a company, many of which will benefit business sectors where many women work: for example the opening up of the health care sector to more providers and the reduction of employer's social insurance contributions in parts of service sectors.

Over and above these measures, the Government sees a need for special action to promote women's enterprise. Approximately EUR 10 million is being used in 2007-2009 to promote women's entrepreneurship and to increase research on and knowledge about women's business opportunities.

As an important part of the initiative the Government launched a three-year programme to promote women's enterprise. The programme

includes co-financing of business development measures; training of business advisers and the development of Internet-based services, role models etc.

In the coming year, the Government will present a comprehensive strategy to further develop initiatives that promote equality in employment and entrepreneurship between women and men.

To promote equal economic independence and equal opportunities in the labour market, issues concerning combining work and family life have to be addressed. In the Budget Bill for 2008, the Government introduced a gender equality bonus in the parental insurance. The aim of the bonus is to improve the conditions for gender equality in both working life and private life. It provides a strong incentive to share the parental allowance equally. Parents who share the parental leave equally, will receive a maximum bonus. The bonus implies that the parent who has stayed home the longest time, receives a tax credit when he or she goes back to work, if the other parent is on parental leave at the same time

Another factor is for women and men to be able to manage the challenges of everyday life. To improve the conditions for women and men to be able to combine work and family life a tax credit was introduced on 1 July 2007 for the purchase of household-related services. This reform makes it possible to reduce women's unpaid double workload in many families.

Members of the committee,

I would just like to briefly touch upon the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Sweden has undertaken measures with respect to the critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action and will continue to do so. The issues covered in the Platform correspond to the foundation for Sweden's national policy for gender equality. Thus, the issues in the Platform will be relevant for Sweden for a long time to come.

In the context of Sweden's contribution to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment internationally, including our international development cooperation, the Government has identified four main areas for intensified work and strategic measures:

1. enhanced participation of women in political processes;
2. women's economic empowerment including rights to property, decent work and resources;

3. sexual and reproductive health and rights;
4. women and security, including combating all forms of sex- and gender-based violence.

In the coming years, the Swedish Government will further strengthen efforts and increase resources for both our bilateral work and our work with multilateral organisations and agencies, including the UN, with respect to these areas.

Members of the Committee,

During the preparatory work, women's organisations and other NGOs were given the opportunity to comment on the report. I want to stress that the Swedish Government greatly appreciates the work done by NGOs. They play a vital role in promoting gender equality and respect for human rights.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that the Swedish Government commends the Committee on its important work and welcomes the extension of its annual sessions. The discussion with the Committee and the Committee's comments on our periodic reports provide important opportunities to work constructively and continuously with the implementation of the Convention in Sweden.

The Government will organise a press conference in Sweden after the Committee has issued its recommendations.

My colleagues and I appreciate this opportunity to have a dialogue with the Members of the Committee. We are now prepared to answer any questions you may have to the best of our ability.

Madame Chair, Members of the Committee, thank you for your attention.
