



PERMANENT MISSION OF SWEDEN

STATEMENT

BY

SWEDEN

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slutlig version

Mr President,

I align myself with the statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

Our common endeavour to promote and protect human rights holds a rare quality among human pursuits; it is a functioning combination of idealism and realism.

If the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had not existed, could we have been able to imagine it? In an international order seemingly comprised of states vying for resources and influence, what room could there be to claim any rights that are shared by all human beings, putting binding obligations on all states?

The great truth is, that the Declaration does exist. Governments, organisations and individuals across the world daily refer to it and the rights it covers, seeking to promote dignity and justice for all human beings regardless of international boundaries.

There could not have been a better back-drop to this session of the Council than Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's statement on the Declaration two days ago. In his introductory remarks the Secretary-General made the point that to make human rights a reality for all we need clear commitments and clear accountability for those commitments. Sweden agrees that our main challenge today is implementation.

The Declaration is a commanding and refined condensation of evolving efforts across the world to express how we understand our title as human beings, a "common standard of achievement" as stated in the preamble of the Declaration itself, for us all.

A reflection made by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan underlines this point sharply, if I might paraphrase. In all his travels across the globe, he once said, it had struck him that the only persons he ever heard speak of cultural differences, of traditional values, of differing understandings of human rights, were representatives of governments. Everyone else expressed the same desire for freedom, for democracy, for the right to speak one's mind and the right to be free from discrimination. This is the real challenge in commemorating the Universal Declaration – responding to this desire and translating it into reality.

The Swedish government salutes the Universal Declaration and will strive to give it the recognition it is due throughout this 60th anniversary year. In two weeks time, the Government will present a report to Parliament on human rights as an integrated part of Swedish foreign policy, confirming this Government's determination to give priority across policy areas, including security policy, development cooperation and trade, to the fight for human rights and democracy and against oppression.

Mr President,

The United Nations is at the heart of international human rights work. Human rights should, as High Commissioner Arbour has said, be the DNA of the UN. Indeed, security and development – the UN's other pillars – are also about human rights.

The High Commissioner and her Office are key to the success of the UN's human rights work. The High Commissioner's independent mandate is crucial to her ability to respond to the many challenges before her Office, helping to make the human rights pillar of the interrelationship between security, development and human rights a reality.

Three years ago, UN member states decided unanimously at the World Summit in 2005 to create the Human Rights Council in order to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights. After a first year marked by institutional issues, the Swedish government now expects the Council to move on to address the many pressing issues of substance within its mandate.

Mr President,

The realism of human rights, I would venture to say, is that a greater share of mankind is enjoying a greater fulfilment of their human rights than at any previous stage in history. This makes the oppression that so many persons nonetheless continue to suffer all the more unacceptable. The credibility of the Council demands that it addresses ongoing violations, wherever they occur. Anything else would amount to the selectivity that we all want to avoid.

Fortunately, we have given the Council several useful tools. The constructive experiences from situations like Darfur and Burma/ Myanmar have demonstrated the value of Special Sessions in exceptional circumstances. The Special Procedures are crucial to addressing both country situations and thematic issues. The country mandates are needed to keep the Council informed of serious situations such as in Burma/Myanmar or the DPRK. The country mandates are also needed to give support and guidance to a number of Governments committed to co-operation with

the Council and interested in technical assistance or capacity building in the area of human rights. Seminars and debates are additional tools we must use to bring attention to various matters.

At the moment, we can see a number of grave or escalating human rights situations that are cause for serious concern, like in Somalia, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and Sri Lanka. The Government of Sweden strongly condemns the recent attacks against civilians in and around the Gaza Strip and urge the parties to make all possible efforts to stop them, to show restraint and cease all activities contrary to international law, including the disproportionate use of force.

Not only must we address situations like these in their own right. We must also make full use of the notion that dealing with human rights violations can serve as an early warning mechanism for protection of civilians and conflict prevention.

The Council should be able to deal with situations before they become threats to international peace and security. The work of the Council is also part of our efforts to live up to our common responsibility to protect as well to our joint duty to end impunity for human rights violations.

Mr President,

The violations suffered by women, men and children in different regions of the world cover many rights.

The General Assembly passed a landmark decision this fall calling on a moratorium on the death penalty pending abolition. For the time being, however, the continuing large-scale use of the death penalty in countries like China and Iran remains deeply distressing. The extensive use of the death penalty in the USA also gives cause for concern.

Homosexual, bisexual and transgender persons continue to suffer discrimination in many countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran and Nigeria. In these and other countries, a first step in ending discrimination must be the decriminalisation of homosexuality. The widespread sexual violence against women and children in areas like the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo is alarming. My government is deeply concerned with the unprecedented increase in the scope of violations against the ban on torture, a core prohibition of international law.

Successful elections this past year in countries like Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste and two years ago in Liberia have underlined the remarkable spread of democracy. At the same time, persons in authoritarian states across the world continue to be denied their right to partake of a democratic system of government – from Belarus and Cuba, to Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe.

Prospects for the enjoyment of the freedom of expression hold both remarkable potential and cause for concern. The development of new media and information technology have created possibilities for exchanging thoughts and ideas in ways that we could not have imagined 10 or 15 years ago – reaching also the populations of authoritarian states. Regrettably, many of those same states have sought to keep pace – jailing, intimidating and harassing journalists, bloggers and ordinary citizens making use of new media.

Mr President,

The seventh regular session of the Human Rights Council amply reflects the broadness of the international human rights agenda.

Our hope is that the Advisory Committee of the Council will consist of members able to give experienced and knowledgeable advice to the Council on that broad range of issues before it.

Parallel to this very busy session, preparations are continuing for the beginning of the Universal Periodic Review system this spring. Through the UPR, we will have a process for reviewing the respect for human rights in all states. This must entail an assessment including criticism where it is due, as well as forward-looking

suggestions for measures to improve the respect for human rights in each reviewed state. The credibility of the Council as such will suffer in direct proportion to any damage to the credibility of the UPR system.

Mr President,

It is perfectly fitting in this 60th anniversary year, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights holds the record for most translated document in the world. As the Declaration reflects our common understanding of ourselves, so too shall we ensure that all persons in generations to come can enjoy its wisdom. A world record is a tremendous achievement, but there are too many people, speaking too many languages, who do not enjoy respect for human rights and democracy. We have come a long way in protecting human rights, but it is an understatement to say that we have plenty of work ahead of us before we have achieved full respect for human rights for all.

Thank you.