



18 March 2020

Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Department for International Law, Human Rights
and Treaty Law

The Office of the High Commissioner
for Human Rights

Sweden's submission to the call for input from SR on violence against women, its causes and consequences

The Swedish Government appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the next report by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Dubravka Šimonović and thanks the Special Rapporteur for the important work she performs under her mandate. Sweden is firmly committed to carry out its obligations as relates to the elimination of all forms of violence against women in full compliance with international human rights law. Furthermore, Sweden supports the Special Rapporteur in applying a feminist perspective to all matters and reiterates the values of democracy and of women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights as they are mutually reinforcing.

Some examples of what measures Sweden has adopted

The Swedish Government has decided on a ten-year national strategy (2017–2026) to prevent and combat men's violence against women. The strategy takes a holistic approach to areas in need of improvement, focusing on the strategy's four objectives for expanded and effective preventive work to combat violence: improved detection of violence, stronger protection for and support to women and children subjected to violence, more effective law enforcement and improved knowledge and methodological development. The strategy has an action programme for the period 2017–2020. Many of the Swedish authorities work to combat violence against women, the Swedish Police Authority is one example. The Police have decided to increase the number of people working with crimes in domestic violence, rape and violent and sexual crimes against children, but also to improve working methods.

Sweden's answers to the questions posed by the Special Rapporteur

1. In 2016 the Swedish Government tasked the University of Gothenburg to carry out a study mapping Swedish journalists' exposure to threats, harassments and violence, this quantitative study was published in 2017. It showed that around every fourth journalist has been subjected to threats, violence or harassment. Exposure is common among journalists covering issues relating to migration and asylum. A fourth of the subjected journalists have avoided writing about a specific issue. Over half of the exposed journalists have become scared and one in four has considered leaving journalism. The study showed that both men and women were subject to threats, but with a significant difference in the nature of the threats. Women journalists tend to receive much more sexual violence or violence related to their bodies, amongst such threats were rape, sexual violence and sexual slurs.
2. The Government's work environment policy is to contribute to a work environment that prevents ill health, accidents and people being excluded from working life. The issue of threats and violence is considered a work environment issue and is covered by the strategy. The Work Environment Authority's provisions on "Prevention of violence and menaces in the working environment" cover all employees and apply to work where there may be a risk of violence or the threat of violence. According to the provisions, the employer shall investigate the risks of violence or threat of violence which may exist in the work and shall take such measures as may be occasioned by the investigation. Incidents and occurrences involving violence or threats of violence shall be recorded and investigated.

The Government has tasked the Media Institute Fojo at Linneaus University (which is state funded) to develop support for journalists and editors that are subject to threats and hate. This includes a knowledge bank and a service offering advice and support. Journalist freelancers and smaller media companies are important target groups. The Media Institute Fojo apply a gender sensitive perspective.

Local police districts and organisational entities working on crime victims and personal safety are responsible for providing local support to media organisations and local politicians. At the national level, the

Swedish Police Authority cooperates with the Swedish Security Service, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority and Victim Support Sweden. There is also a joint group for heads of security in the media industry which is linked to the National Operations Department at the Swedish Police Authority. It is stated in the police's internal guidelines that a person who is threatened but still needs to act openly in their line of duty, for example politicians and journalists, may need special protective measures. In the event of a very high threat, a bodyguard might be provided.

All police regions have specifically designated investigators of hate crimes and crimes against democracy which includes crimes against journalists. In the police regions Stockholm, South and West there are particular investigation units working on hate crimes and crimes against democracy. The units for hate crimes and crimes against democracy and other specifically designated resources will cooperate with the units for crime victims and personal safety if they make the assessment that special measures in the area of crime victim support or personal protection are required.

3. In 2017 the Swedish Government adopted a National Action Plan named “Defending free speech” to address threats and hate speech against journalists, elected representatives and artists.¹ The Action Plan aims at strengthening three main areas: measures for deeper knowledge of threats and hatred, support for those exposed, and strengthen the work of the judicial system.
4. Even though there is no specific section in the Criminal Code concerning crimes committed against journalists, the courts may increase the penalty if a crime was committed with the intent to silence the journalist in his or her professional capacity. Under Swedish domestic law killings are criminalized as e.g. murder, threats of rape as making an unlawful threat and harassment as molestation and defamation. The making of unlawful threats, molestation and defamation can be committed offline, online or by using ICT. These

¹ The National Action Plan: <https://www.regeringen.se/informationsmaterial/2018/05/action-plan-defending-free-speech/>.

are general provisions which apply irrespective of the victim's gender or profession.

5. Any woman exposed to violence or threats, facilitated by ICT or not, has access to complaint mechanisms with the Police. Should an ICT-facilitated complaint lead to a criminal investigation coercive measures such as the seizure of a computer equipment may be taken. Ultimately it may be confiscated.

According to the Act on Responsibility for Electronic Bulletin Boards (1998:112), a supplier of an electronic bulletin board must remove a message or in some other way make it inaccessible, if the message content is obviously such as is referred to in certain listed penalty provisions, inter alia provisions on unlawful threats and unlawful breach of privacy. Computers and other equipment may be declared forfeited.

Public Swedish authorities do not operate a general, legally based framework for reporting and requesting the removal of harmful or illegal content. One important reason for this is connected to the need to establish clear, precise and proportionate legislation in order to prevent infringements of fundamental rights such as the freedom of expression and the freedom of the media. Consequently, Sweden also has concerns in relation to the use of the vague term harmful in this context. However, Sweden will as of now play an active role in developing new EU-legislation in this area.

Sweden notes that major social media and platforms online today operate easily accessible complaint mechanisms, but more can be done to further improve accessibility to these mechanisms. However, it should be pointed out that in particular journalists have expressed that once they have made a complaint, further contacts with and information from completely internet-based social media and internet platforms in their native language could be improved. To this end, Sweden is of the view that this is an issue for further improvements. The Swedish Minister of Justice has also brought forward this issue in dialogues with some the major internet platforms.