



REGERINGSKANSLIET

**Statement by Mr Jens Orback, Minister for Gender Equality, Head of
Delegation of Sweden at the UN Commission on the Status of Women,
27 February 2006**

Madame Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Sweden aligns itself with the statement made by Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Most of the challenges that our community is facing, have been addressed by speakers from this podium. They include the struggle to overcome poverty, to promote democracy and human rights and to safeguard access to education and health, such as HIV/AIDS programmes.

How do we meet these challenges? The Swedish government is convinced that intensified efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental or rather a prerequisite for meeting these challenges. Why? Because at the center of all development are the people who drive, direct and determine it; and by people we mean women and men, girls and boys. We believe, as was stated by the World summit, that progress for women is progress for all.

We can no longer afford to fail to take account of skills and experience of half of the world's population! Women's equal participation in political decision-making, for example in Parliaments and Cabinets is necessary if we want our countries to have broad-based and inclusive economic growth. I am pleased to note that Sweden is now competing with more and more countries when it comes to the number of women elected to parliament. Rwanda is ahead of us in the number one position. We congratulate the peoples of Chile and Liberia for their election of their continents' first female presidents.

The basic principle is simply that all people, regardless of sex, ethnic origin, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability – are of equal value and must be able to enjoy the same human rights, responsibilities and opportunities in all areas of society. Not only for the sake of democracy, but for the advancement of society as a whole.

Madame Chair,

Our work for gender equality is governed by our understanding that a gender-based power structure exists, meaning that we see that women are subordinate to men and that this is something we want to change. To be successful in making these changes we must ensure that a gender perspective is present in all policy areas. The gender mainstreaming strategy is therefore essential if we want to achieve a gender equal society.

The welfare system is one of the foundations of the Swedish society. Paid work for women and men is one of its cornerstones. We believe that women and men must have the same opportunities to support themselves and their families. We can also see that investments in women's and girls' economic, political and social empowerment translate into reduction of family and community poverty. Human rights, development and security thus go hand in hand.

Madame Chair,

The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Outcome document from Beijing +5 and the political declaration adopted at CSW last year constitute global commitments for the empowerment of women and for gender equality.

We also have added impetus through the outcome document from the UN Millennium World Summit in September last year, in which article 12 clearly states that gender equality and the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all are essential to advance development, peace and security. Full and effective implementation of these instruments will lead us to a future in which gender-based discrimination is a thing of the past and where gender equality is taken for granted.

Madame Chair,

To achieve a gender equal society we must work with a whole range of issues at the same time. We must focus on the interrelationship between gender-based violence, health, education and employment. To combat men's violence against women is a priority issue for the Government of Sweden. We must abolish all existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that discriminate against women and girls.

Madame Chair,

This year, 2006, hundreds of thousands of women and children, mostly girls, will be recruited, transported, marketed and purchased for sexual exploitation in the prostitution industry. This is nothing but a shame of our time!

The Swedish government considers it our fundamental obligation to counteract trafficking in human beings. Full gender equality and equal participation of women and men in all fields of society cannot be brought about as long as some women and children, mostly girls, in our countries are victims of prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual or other exploitative purposes.

The Swedish Government and Parliament acknowledge that the demand for women and children is an important root cause of prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes. If men did not buy and sexually exploit women and children and regard them as commodities, prostitution and trafficking in human beings would not exist. To all the men who pay for sexual services, I want to say: you are responsible for actions that contribute to the exploitation of another human being!

Unfortunately some contexts clearly promote prostitution and sexual exploitation to the shame of us all, for example international sporting events. Together with the Deputy prime minister of Sweden and the director of the Swedish Football Association, I have urged, in public articles, all football supporters to adopt fair play both within and outside the football arena. It is simply not OK to buy sex.

Let me make myself clear; I love football, but not as much as I despise sexual exploitation!

Since the Swedish Act prohibiting the purchase of sexual services came into force in 1999 the number of men who buy sexual services has fallen, as has the number of women and girls recruited into prostitution and trafficking. I am very glad to see that there are other countries introducing similar legislation.

Madame Chair,

One of the more decisive markers of autonomy and full human worth is the control over one's own body and sexuality. Women must be able to exercise the right to make all decisions concerning their own bodies and reproduction. Efforts to change men's attitudes towards women and sexuality must be intensified.

Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is crucial to women's opportunities to support themselves and hereby to socio-economic growth. Access to safe and legal abortions and means to prevent the spread of HIV/aids are essential. Abortion-related mortality is highest where abortion is illegal and where women do not have control over their own sexuality and fertility. This is especially significant for young women.

The Government of Sweden has recently adopted a policy for Sweden's international work for sexual and reproductive health and rights. The policy states our position on a range of issues and provides a strategic tool for the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty eradication, development, peace and security for both individuals and states. Let me make myself clear; a society which denies a woman her right to her own body does not only take away her human rights, but is also risking her life.

Madame Chair,

Let me conclude by saying that none of us has ever lived in a truly inclusive and gender-equal society. Therefore, we are working towards realizing something beyond the familiar; a possibility of enormous potential. Progress is not only possible but is actually taking place. For example, abortion rates declined rapidly with establishment of family planning information and services, increased supplies of contraceptives and the active involvement of civil society and religious groups according to the UNFPA. The UNIFEM reports that women's employment has increased throughout the world. Investments in the education of girls is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty, according to different recent reports. This perspective strengthens me in my belief that gender equality is not a utopia – it is possible to achieve. It is also absolutely necessary in our struggle for a sustainable national and global society. And from us, the speakers from this podium, the generations to come should expect nothing less.

Thank you!