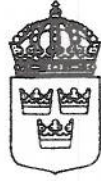


# SWEDEN



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Statement  
by  
H.E. Ms. Nyamko Sabuni  
Minister of Gender Equality

The fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

United Nations  
New York

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -



Mr/Madam Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

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It is an honour for me to address the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Sweden aligns itself with the statement made by Hungary on behalf of the European Union.

The theme for this session is *Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work*. I would like to start out with an important message from Unicef "By combining the right to education with rights within education, we can achieve rights through education."

Let's be honest. We cannot achieve equality between men and women with a single political decision. It takes time. More than anything, we need to begin early, by changing the way we raise and educate our children.

Good quality education is essential in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. The girls and boys we raise and educate today will be

tomorrow's parents, engineers, teachers, business owners and policy makers.

Educated adults are more likely to make informed choices about their future and families. Parents who have received an education are more likely to send their children to school.

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Take a snapshot of the state of education across the globe. On the one hand, you will see that school attendance rates are rising rapidly worldwide and the gender gap is narrowing. On the other hand, there are still 72 million children of primary school age who are not in school. Most of them are girls.

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Sweden has a long history of promoting gender equality within employment and education. But many challenges remain. Girls and boys are not met with the same expectations, are not treated equally, and they experience the school day differently. In the end, they also make different career choices.

A recent Swedish report has found that girls suffer more stress at school than boys do. Girls show better educational achievements, while boys tend to fall behind, especially in reading. Still, boys express greater confidence in the future than girls do. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that women's education does



not pay off as well as it does for men. The same pattern can be seen in many European countries.

The fact that good grades do not pay off for girls and young women, combined with the lack of affordable childcare in many parts of Europe, largely explains

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why many educated women stay at home. In fact, Europe is home to one of the world's most well-educated housewives. We need to ensure that education pays off, also for girls and women.

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In other parts of the world, girls and women face different problems. In many countries, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, girls do not complete their education. The main reason for this, apart from practical problems such as school fees and lack of school transport, is discrimination resulting from traditions and customs, violence, early marriage and early pregnancy.

Every single day, 28 000 girls under the age of 18 get married, often against their will. Every single day, thousands of girls are told that their duty is to be a wife, not a student. Every single day, 40 000 teenage girls give birth. And as a result, pregnancy and childbirth are leading causes of death for girls between the ages of 15 and 19. Let me be clear: these traditions, often rooted in religion and

culture, are not in the best interest of girls. They represent clear and unacceptable obstacles to their enjoyment of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. These harmful traditions not only prevent girls from going to school – they jeopardize their health and may lead to their death.

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This brings me to an issue on which we never seem to agree: the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Women and girls die because political leaders do not agree, and do not focus on women's health. Because resources are not provided. Because women are denied the right to decide over their own bodies, sexuality and reproduction.

The right to decide and exercise control over one's own body, sexuality and reproduction is fundamental for everyone. Sexuality education therefore needs to be an important part of the school curriculum. Comprehensive sexuality education is an essential tool in the fight to reduce maternal mortality, HIV infections and violence against women.

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Mr/ Madam Chair,

Over the last few weeks we have seen massive demonstrations for democratic governance, justice, development and respect for human rights in several

countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Long-standing autocratic regimes are being forced to step down. Free and fair elections will hopefully soon be held. Women have been an important part of these movements. We need to ensure that these events also bring about greater empowerment of women. Sustainable development cannot be achieved unless women's rights are

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respected, their voices heard and their skills counted. Women in these and other regions will need our outspoken support in this struggle.

Sweden welcomes the establishment of UN Women. With the establishment of UN Women, the need to strengthen gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment throughout the UN system was given full political backing. We now need to turn our attention to the practical implications of our political commitments. UN Women's main role should be catalytic, actively promoting gender equality, gender mainstreaming, the empowerment of women and full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in all sectors of policy and programming. Sweden stands ready to support these efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

US President Barack Obama has called for action in order to "win the future".

The future we should be winning allows girls to go through school before marriage. It provides young women – and men – with education about sexual and reproductive health and rights. It makes sure that our children are able to



make informed decisions about their own future that are not based on preconceived gender notions. A better future for our children should always guide our policies. And the starting point is offering them the highest quality education.

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Thank you.