

**Statement by**  
**H.E. Ms Nyamko Sabuni,**  
**Minister for Integration and Gender Equality,**  
**Head of Delegation of Sweden at the**  
**54<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women,**  
**United Nations,**  
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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

Mr/Madam Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

It is an honour for me to address the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. This session marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Sweden supports the statement made by Spain on behalf of the European Union.

The 1995 adoption of the Beijing Platform was a unique accomplishment. It raised the bar for governments across the world. Gender equality now is a stronger part of the international legal framework and women's rights have been better implemented in state policies thanks to the Beijing platform.

We are here to review how far we have come and how to move forward. There are many reasons to be proud. The gap between women and men in employment, education and research has narrowed. The number of women in professional jobs and in manager level is increasing.

These accomplishments are worth celebrating. One important conclusion is that change is possible. Change happened because people had the vision, courage and the will to act.

Despite all the progress, there are several areas of concern. In many places, women remain second-class citizens. Women are forced into trafficking, prostitution and under-age marriage. Women are discriminated, beaten, mutilated and killed. Women are denied opportunities to learn, study, work and enjoy their fundamental human rights. This is true for all continents, including Western countries.

Why has oppression of women remained deep-rooted 50 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? There is no simple explanation. Different ideologies provide different answers. I would like to highlight the role of culture and religion.

The major religions have, in different ways, been misused to portray women as inferior to men. Verses written thousands of years ago have served not only as spiritual guidelines, but as justification for the suppression of women.

You can never excuse, accept or tolerate discrimination of women as part of a religious or cultural context.

There is no clear-cut dividing-line between what is religion and what is culture, but the two affect each other. The end result is a structure that enables men to use pressure on women and girls, and ultimately punish perceived misbehavior.

In Afghanistan, Taliban fighters burn down schools for girls. Hundreds of young brides are burnt to death every year in India because of dowry disputes. Female genital mutilation occurs to about 3 million girls a year in Africa alone.

Remember Medine Memi, a 16-year old girl from Turkey that was found suffocated this December in a hole in the ground. She had been buried alive, with her hands tied behind her back. She was allegedly punished for meeting with boys.

These examples are not simply crimes by one or two individuals: they are the end-result of traditions that reinforce the idea of the inferior status of women.

States around the world have taken steps to fight these practices. All of us need to intensify our efforts.

Mr/Madam Chair,

I would like to bring up two areas of concern: The first concerns implementation of ethical guidelines during international missions. The UN is a symbol for human rights and this meeting illustrates the UN's commitment. In other parts of the world, it is the personnel deployed that represent the UN's founding values.

The way UN personnel acts must therefore be consistent with UN ideals regarding gender equality. We need to strengthen the dialogue on ethical guidelines for personnel deployed on UN missions. All personnel should receive education in women's rights and there should be strict prohibitions against soliciting sex or pursuing sexual relations in the countries where peace keeping missions are deployed. Zero-tolerance isn't enough. We need pre-emptive measures and effective implementation. We need to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted.

Secondly, Women and girls have the right to decide over their own body and sexuality. Sweden will continue to strive for the rights of women and girls, and men and boys, to comprehensive sexuality education. We stress the right to sexual and reproductive health including access to safe and legal abortions. Women and men must have access to affordable primary health care and services, and access to a wide range of contraceptive methods. This includes condoms, which can prevent unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS.

The 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women offers an opportunity to reaffirm our collective commitment to the Convention.

Sweden reaffirms its commitment to the fulfillment of resolutions 1325 and 1820, and welcomes the recent adoption of Security Council resolutions 1888 and 1889. Protection for women and girls in armed conflict is a high priority issue for the Swedish Government. Perpetrators of gender-based violence must be held accountable and brought to justice.

Mr/Madam Chair,

General Assembly resolution 63/311 and the report of the Secretary-General “Comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women” are important steps towards the realisation of United Nations obligations to women around the world. We therefore hope that all Member States will wholeheartedly support this important proposal and there should be no further delays in the implementation of this reform..

Let us continue to work together to ensure the fulfillment of the commitments we made 15 years ago in Beijing, and let us recall that “the empowerment of women is the empowerment of all humanity!”

Thank you!