



Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Mr. Christer Hallerby,
State Secretary at the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality,
Head of Delegation of Sweden at the UN Commission on the Status of
Women**

Mr./Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

I am honoured to speak here today and I would like to commend the Commission on its important work. Sweden aligns itself with the statement made by the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

Priorities shift – especially during an economic downturn. Everything seems to be about the economy. Human rights seem less important. This is not acceptable. Human Rights must not be neglected anywhere, anytime and under no circumstances.

To strive for equality between women and men is an obligation for any society. But today, while the headlines mostly are about financial crisis and economic recession, we

must remind ourselves and others, that gender equality is also a necessity for sound and sustainable economic development.

Despite progress, gender *inequality* is still a fact in all our countries. Despite the fact that most countries have prohibitive legislation, domestic violence is widely spread. Despite the fact that most countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the lives of especially young girls are still severely restricted.

Mr./Madam Chairperson,

Women's entry into the labour force has meant a rethinking about gender roles. If we want both men and women to participate in working life, we must work to change the traditional division of labour in the household.

Gender roles are not static, given by nature and birth. Gender roles change, and must change, with social, economic and democratic developments.

The Swedish father's share of parental leave is increasing, but it is still far too small. One reason is that since the father usually earns more than the mother, the household's income decreases if the parents share the responsibility equally. This is why the Government in 2008 introduced a *gender equality bonus* in order to promote the equal sharing of parental leave between the parents. A measure that, I think, is unique in the

world. The bonus is a tax relief that is paid to parents who share their paid parental leave more equally.

Mr./Madam Chairperson,

All forms of discrimination are obstacles to democracy and development. The basic principle is simple: every person, regardless of sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability or cultural and religious traditions, is of equal value and dignity and their human rights must be respected, protected and promoted.

Gender equality and the rights and roles of women comprise one of the Swedish Government's main thematic priorities in our international development cooperation. Increased resources are being made available to promote women's economic and political empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to increase security for women and girls including combating all forms of gender-based violence and trafficking in human beings.

The activist and founder of the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education Elise Ottesen-Jensen once said "I dream of the day when every newborn child is welcome, when men and women are equal, and when sexuality is an expression of intimacy, joy and tenderness."

Sweden will continue to strive for the rights of all girls and women as well as of all men and boys to sexuality education and to sexual and reproductive health and rights and access to care and services, including contraception. Women need to have the means to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, in particular HIV. Women must have access to childbirth attended by skilled health personnel, as well as to safe, legal abortions.

Mr./Madam Chairperson,

Globally, we already have a range of agreed policies and legal instruments. What we need now is action. We must allocate resources, set clear targets and work more purposefully to reach them. What we need is more commitment, more engagement and more action.

Thank you!