

Dear Child Exhibition – Zagreb, 16 March 2004

First of all I would like to thank you for the invitation to come here to Zagreb. I am looking forward very much to sharing experiences with you. And I am also sure you will appreciate the great photos taken by Ms Ulla Lemberg, which will be presented in the exhibition that we will attend later on.

I have been asked to give you a short overview of the gender equality work in Sweden including a brief historical retrospective.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that gender equality is a fundamental factor in democracy, as democracy is based on equal value and rights of all people – both women and men. Gender equality must therefore mainstream all aspects of our lives. This is also the expressed opinion of the Swedish Parliament as well as the Swedish Government.

Consequently, the basis for Swedish gender equality policy today is a society in which women and men have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all areas of life. This is also the overall objective set by the Swedish Government.

This overall objective is formulated very generally and must be seen as an expressed political will.

So this is the basis for Swedish gender equality policy and it has been hard and conscious work to reach this standpoint that we now all agree on.

I will give you some brief glimpses of the way that has led us to the present situation and to the gender equality policy in Sweden of today.

Let us take a large step backwards.

A hundred years ago, Sweden was still an agrarian country, but developed rapidly into an industrial nation. Along with the industrialisation came the necessity of reforms. Democratisation, educational reforms and social security systems were developed - and they all primarily targeted men.

Today's Swedish policy on equality between women and men could be said to have originated some forty years ago. It all started during the 1960s when female labour was required and the ideal of the model housewife began to be called into question. The sex role debate began in Sweden, as well as in other western countries. The old view of women and men complementing one another was replaced by the notion that the sexes were basically similar.

But even then, gender equality was viewed primarily as an important strategic step on the path to justice and democracy.

As I mentioned, women were needed on the labour market during the sixties. In line with this, several political reforms took place to support women's entry into the labour market. During the 1970's some million women went out on the labour market – and

they have remained there. Today we have almost equal numbers of women and men in the labour force.

Since the 1970's there have been two strong lines, which have been central in the gender equality policy – the first is women's right to economic independence, and the second is women's right to power and influence. Both these lines are crucial in a gender equal society.

The creation of a specific policy and the construction of national machinery for gender equality started back in the 1970's and began when the Government appointed a Government Commission on Equality between Women and Men. In 1976, the first Minister for Gender Equality Affairs was appointed and, in 1980, we got our first Gender Equality Act.

The Division for Gender Equality in the government offices was established in 1982.

I just wish to mention three of the – in my opinion – most important decisions taken on the way towards equal opportunities between women and men in Sweden.

And first of all I would like to emphasize the importance of the individual income tax law of 1971. This new tax law meant that spouses were taxed individually and not jointly. Before this reform, the tax system discriminated against families with two breadwinners.

Today the Swedish welfare state is based on a dual bread-winner model and has adopted a complete gender-neutral concept of social citizenship.

Another important reform was the parental insurance scheme of 1974, which meant that the motherhood allowance was replaced by a parental allowance,

And thirdly, I wish to mention the parliamentary decision, in 1974, to expand the provision of child-care in Sweden.

Although the fight for gender equality has been under way for more than 100 years, and although much progress has been achieved, it is still a fact in our societies throughout the world that a distinct power and gender structure prevails, with men as superior and women as inferior.

The basis of independence, choices of one's own and thus gender equality, is money in the hand, in the wallet, in the handbag. The fact that Swedish women are able to support themselves and can live their own lives, if they want to, is the result of the struggles of many generations of women.

I would like to give you some information about the context in which we work with gender equality in Sweden today.

Sweden is divided into 21 regions and since 1995 we have had experts for gender equality in each region. The tasks of these experts are to implement the national policy for gender equality in their regions and to promote and develop the integration of a gender perspective in all policy fields within the region.

At national level the Minister for Gender Equality coordinates the government policy for gender equality. The Division for Gender Equality, where I work, is within the Government Offices and is attached to the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications. Its main objectives are to assist the Minister for Gender Equality in co-ordinating the government's policy in this field.

The Swedish Government has chosen gender mainstreaming, as the strategy to achieve gender equality. But I think it is important to make clear that this does not mean the exclusion of specific measures aimed at promoting gender equality. Considering a gender perspective as an integral part of activities and decision-making means that we more easily can identify where specific measures are most needed.

In 1995, the Women's Conference in Beijing proclaimed a shift of strategies for applying gender mainstreaming. This was just in line with the national agenda in Sweden at the time, and also in line with our conviction that a policy for equality between women and men cannot be formulated independently of other policy areas.

The step from understanding into practice is huge. So for the time being, we are doing our very best to bring the strategy of gender mainstreaming into practice in our daily work.

As you all know perfectly well, efforts to promote gender equality have for too long been directed exclusively at women, as if *they* were the problem and it was *their* responsibility to adapt to men's lifestyles and modes of thought. But gender equality is not about conforming to male values; it is about building new, equal relationships based on equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for both *women and men*.

A gender perspective means that you have to highlight both women and men. But how can we get men involved in gender equality issues?

During the period 1983 to 1992, a *Think Tank Group on the Role of Men* worked with information and opinion-moulding activities in order to influence attitudes to male issues in different sections of society. These activities dealt with such questions as what happens when men become fathers and grandfathers, or choose their education or profession.

After that, special *father's training projects* have been carried out in some counties. These are within the framework of existing parenthood training programmes, aimed at informing both parents of the physical and psychological implications of parenthood. Fathers and fathers-to-be meet in groups led by men, to discuss men's needs and interests in connection with childbirth.

The Government has granted funds to projects about men and the family, and ways to encourage men to move into professions dominated by women. Funds have also been allocated to information campaigns to encourage and facilitate men to take longer periods of parental leave.

If women and men are to live, work and participate in the life of the community on equal terms, the active collaboration of both sexes in the task of promoting gender equality is essential. Luckily enough, the Swedish government has understood this.

In May last year, 2003, the government submitted a report on gender equality policy to the Swedish Parliament. It contained a gender equality action plan drawn up in collaboration with the Left Party and the Green Party in Sweden

The background as it is presented in this report is, that despite a long history of active commitment to gender equality, Swedish society is still characterized by a gender-based power structure.

It says, inter alia, that we must be aware of the existence of a gender-based power structure that makes women subordinate to men. The government must regard 'male' and 'female' as social constructions, i.e. patterns of behaviour determined by a person's upbringing and culture, by economic conditions, power structures and political ideology.

This state of affairs has remained unchanged despite the fact that women are now almost fully represented in policy and the labour market. In some spheres, however, there remains a lot to do, even if the gap is closing. If we do not succeed in breaking down the present gender-based power structure, we will fail to achieve a gender equal society.

Although gender equality policy must be broadly based, a set of priorities – which may vary from time to time – has been defined. Five focus areas, which will be highlighted during the government's term of office, have been identified.

These five areas are:

Representation; that is, equal access to positions of power and influence,

Equal pay for equal work and work of equal value,

Violence committed by men against women, including prostitution and trafficking in women for purposes of sexual exploitation,

Men and gender equality,

and finally sexualisation in the public sphere. By this we mean, for example, things like advertisements that degrade women.

To make sure that something comes out in practise, the government is just about to appoint a Committee of Inquiry to evaluate the objectives, direction, organisation and impact of its gender equality policies. The committee is to submit proposals on objectives and outcome indicators for gender equality policies, assess the role and tasks of public authorities in this area, and submit proposals on the future organisation and direction of gender equality work.

As I said, violence committed by men against women, is one of the areas focused on by the Swedish government during this period of mandate. It is not a new focus area. It is a fact, that men commit the majority of violent crimes. The violence is directed against women, children and other men. Men's violence against women is largely an expression of the imbalance of power that prevails in the relationship between women and men. Thus, preventing men's violence against women is a gender equality issue of great importance.

The system of criminal justice has taken this into account and several laws have been admitted. But it is not only a question of criminal justice. You must also undertake preventive actions. One main feature in a Governmental Bill for Action

against Violence against Women from 1998, was thus to provide female victims better treatment by the authorities. Women victims must be better understood and supported by the professional groups they come in contact with.

Several public authorities were charged to undertake action in the period up to the end of the year 2002. They were instructed to increase their efforts to prevent violence against women and to draw up action plans for their own work in this area. Strong emphasis was placed on the importance of cooperation between authorities and organisations.

The effects of these actions are now to be followed up by a Governmental Committee.

The other part of the same focus area is prostitution and trafficking in women for purposes of sexual exploitation.

The Swedish Government has for a long time prioritised the fight against prostitution and trafficking in human beings, especially women and children, nationally and internationally.

They – that is the Government – have made a commitment to work against the growing trade in women and children for prostitution by putting into place preventative measures, effective legal protection and support for the victims, as well as prosecution of the perpetrators.

The new prohibition marks Sweden's attitude, that prostitution is an undesirable phenomenon. The Government considers, however, that it is not reasonable to punish the person who sells sexual services. On the contrary, this person is considered to be in a defenceless position, being exploited by both procurers and clients. It is also important to motivate women in prostitution to seek help without running the risk of punishment. Consequently, it is only the person who obtains this casual sexual service, who is subject to criminality. The provider of sexual services is under no circumstances subject to criminal liability.

The fifth focus area – sexualisation in the public sphere – is an area that we think is of great importance, but we have not found the ways to tackle it yet.

I think it is clear that the Swedish government has understood that women and men together must build a society, where gender equality is the norm. We still have a long way to go, but in a historical perspective, positive steps have been taken towards gender equality.

Maybe men's active participation to tear down the last corner stones of the male privilege and power pyramid, can give enough strength to form a society, where the theory of human rights becomes a reality.

To conclude, I just want to say that I think we are on the way towards a gender equal society in Sweden, even if we, who work with gender equality questions, often have the feeling that progress is made with very small steps and we certainly have a lot more to do, before we can proclaim ourselves a gender equal country.

Thank you.