

SWEDEN



STATEMENT

by

**H.E. Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt
Prime Minister of Sweden**

at the

**General Debate of the
68th Session of the General Assembly**

**United Nations
New York**

24 September, 2013

- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

Mr. President,
Mr Secretary-General,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world is constantly changing. And the pace of change is increasing every year.

The world is a very different place today – compared to only 10 years ago. Compared to when the United Nations' Millenium Development Goals were set.

But it is important to understand the nature of the changes. And to draw the right conclusions. Because only then are we able to have an influence. And to shape our own future.

* * *

Mr. President,

We see the fastest reduction in poverty in human history. Child death rates have fallen - meaning that 14.000 less children are dying every day. Deaths from malaria and tuberculosis are decreasing. New HIV infections are declining.

People are living longer. 100 years ago, the average life expectancy in Sweden was below 60 years. Today, many children born in my country will live to celebrate their 100 year birthday.

These are truly amazing developments.

The world economy is growing. This year, developing and emerging countries' share of the world economy will surpass the share of developed countries. In 10 years time, they will dominate the growing world economy.

We see the same pattern in expanding global trade flows. The share of developing countries' exports has grown substantially and now accounts for almost half of all exports in the world.

This creates jobs and growth for everyone – and increases global equality.

Technological change is also rapid.

Seeking information from the other side of the globe is now every-day-life for many people. Not only for the privileged few. As an example the number of mobile phone users has risen from less than one billion to more than six billion.

But challenges are still plenty. And it is crucial that we intensify our efforts to achieve the existing Millennium Development Goals.

Sweden continues to contribute 1 per cent of its GNI in official development assistance.

Sweden is a firm believer in multilateral organisations, in international cooperation and in the United Nations. United Nations play a key role in coordinating our efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals. We believe that together we become hopeful instead of helpless.

Therefore Sweden contributes yearly with around 1.2 billion US dollars to the UN-system. That makes us the second biggest contributor per capita to the United Nations in the world. Something we are very proud of.

Mr. President,

In addition to the existing Millennium Development Goals we must also work to establish a strong post-2015 development agenda.

With the objective of eradicating extreme poverty and raising standards of living for everyone. And offering equal opportunities to everyone.

Here, I would like to draw your attention to the three areas which I believe are central to human and economic development – gender equality, democracy and free trade. These areas have the capacity to influence developments in many other areas at the same time.

When I addressed this General Assembly two years ago, I spoke about the most important human rights failure of all. The one that affects the largest number of human beings.

I want to raise the issue of gender equality once again. Because this challenge is as present and as urgent today.

Gender equality is first and foremost a question of ensuring the same human, economic and social rights for half of the world's population. Something that should be self evident.

Still every year, one billion women are subject to sexual or physical violence.

Still women are refused equal access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Still every day, 800 women die from preventable complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Still legal restrictions exist so that women are prevented to own, inherit and acquire property in many countries.

Still many girls and women are refused access to schools and education.

For many women the idea that a government would have more female than male ministers – like in Sweden – seems like utopia. Many of these women are not even allowed to vote.

Against this background, Sweden was one of the countries that gave strong support to creating the organisation UN Women and is today one of its biggest donors.

It is our firm belief that by ensuring gender equality you also improve a country's productivity, economy and rule of law.

Educating girls and women leads directly to an increase in a country's economic output. Educated mothers place higher value on schooling their own children.

Closing the gap between male and female employment rates increases a country's GDP substantially.

Increased participation by women in politics and business lead to clear improvements for the public good and to less corruption.

Inclusion of women in peace processes makes peace easier and more stable.

Let me be very clear, it is simply neither acceptable nor very smart to discriminate against women and girls.

Mr. President,

To achieve sustainable development, you need a democratic governance that encompasses all individuals. A system that covers not only the state, but also the private sector and civil society organizations. You need a governing system that is accountable - and transparent about its actions.

Nevertheless, almost one third of the world's population lives under authoritarian rule. A serious barrier to development.

With the growing economic power in many developing countries comes an opportunity – and a responsibility - to use this power wisely and for the common good of everyone.

Every person's human right must be respected – independent of origin, religion, handicap, gender, sexual preference or transsexual identity. Only then will society reap the benefits of all human resources.

Only when people can freely express their political opinion - and freely participate in a thriving civil society - can they truly participate in the life of their community. This applies also to freedom on the internet.

Only with functioning courts do people feel safe to make investments and develop their businesses.

Only with respect for rule of law can you tackle organised crime and corruption.

Only with democratic principles can you ensure freedom from conflict and violence.

Violence and oppression in all its forms is one of the main threats to the development of people, and the development of societies. We know that it takes on average seven years to fight a civil war. And seventeen years to recover from a war.

This is why conflict is sometimes called “development in reverse”.

As we speak, there are several major conflicts going on, causing death and suffering, hunger and diseases, rape and sexual violence. Depriving men, women and children of their right to a prosperous life and a future of hope. Focus on fragile states will remain necessary.

The civil war raging in Syria for more than two years must come to an end. Those responsible for systematic violations of human rights – including those responsible for the use of chemical weapons – must be held accountable. The conflict must be handled within the UN-system. There is an urgent need for a political solution of the conflict and a transition to a free and democratic Syria.

It is time for a new era where countries in conflict can join the rest of the world in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. For this we need a strong United Nations and a well-functioning Security Council.

I want to thank all peacekeepers and peace-builders of the UN for their efforts and sacrifices. Sweden will further contribute to and participate in these efforts.

We also give strong support to the areas of democracy, human rights and freedom from violence. Sweden is one of biggest donors to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

We are trying to help out by humanitarian assistance in the crisis in Syria and by receiving refugees. This year we have welcomed 16.000 Syrians to Sweden.

Mr. President,

Let me mention a third area which I believe we need to focus on in the post-2015 development agenda – trade and competition.

Protectionism is very expensive. It raises prices and lowers standards of living.

Let me illustrate this by a striking example.

According to the World Trade Organization, consumers and governments in rich countries pay 350 billion US dollars per year supporting agriculture. Enough to fly their 41 million dairy cows first class around the world.

Let me mention some other - maybe more down-to-earth - examples.

When competition has been introduced for mobile phone companies in some countries, the cost of calls have fallen by 30-50 percent.

Studies show that lowering services barriers by one third under the Doha Development Agenda would raise developing countries' incomes by around 60 billion US dollars.

Unfortunately, progress in the Doha Round has been slow. But the good news is that many countries are doing what they can to liberalise trade through regional agreements instead. Because they know this will benefit their economies.

The two free trade agreements now being negotiated between the United States and the European Union and between the United States and a number of countries in Asia and Latin America will cover two-thirds of world trade. This will create growth and jobs.

Sweden is one of the countries within the European Union working hardest to get the transatlantic deal in place.

Freer trade and openness also means that new impulses and trends affect a country faster. This puts pressure on reform in countries and companies to meet global competition.

Sweden is an example of this.

Trade has made it possible for us to double our economic output. Our companies have learned that they must consistently take on new trends and technology in order to stay competitive. If not, our GDP and standard of living would fall significantly.

And let us also remember how important trade is for peaceful relations. To put it very simply, no sales person wants to start a war against a country where it has customers. That would be a bad business strategy. Trade enables peace.

Mr. President,

Climate change continues. And as a consequence extreme weather conditions in many parts of the world. Leading to loss of lives and very high cost for society.

The European Union's and the United States emissions are falling. But overall global emissions are increasing. That is why all countries need to contribute to the international efforts in the fight against climate change. The European Union and the United States cannot solve the problem of climate change on their own, when they only account for around 25 percent of emissions.

The international structures we have to deal with climate change commitments are unfortunately obsolete. We need a new agreement that ensures that all major emitters make commitments enough so that we can reach the 2-degree target.

Mr. President,

It is our duty to strive for a society and a world that gives everybody the possibility to create his or her own future.

This is what every woman, every man, every girl and every boy deserves. Let me underline that this is in the very interest of every country. Because people are the real wealth of a nation.

The Millennium Development Goals have been very successful in coordinating and focusing our efforts on the areas where progress has been most urgent.

Now we need to prepare for tomorrow. And in doing this Sweden is convinced that the United Nations will play a very important role. We will continue our strong support to this organization.

Thank you Mr President!