

SWEDEN



STATEMENT

by

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

at the

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

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

More than ten years ago we decided to set eight concrete goals. To free humanity from extreme poverty, from hunger and disease and from illiteracy. We called them the Millennium Development Goals. These goals have been powerful. They have helped the international community to monitor and mobilise resources for development cooperation.

And important progress has been made. We have seen poverty declining in many countries. By 2015, the global poverty rate is expected to fall below fifteen per cent.

We have seen some of the poorest countries make the greatest strides in education. Child mortality has been reduced. New HIV infections are declining steadily. We have seen increased access to clean drinking water.

But we still have a long way to go in other areas. To raise standards of living. To offer equal opportunities to people around the globe.

Today, I would like to focus on one key area. It is an area where progress is still very slow. But since it affects half of the world's population and half of the world's human resources, it is of crucial importance.

I am referring to maybe the most important human rights failure of all. At least the one that affects the largest number of human beings.

I am referring to the unmet human, economic and social rights for 3.5 billion women and girls. They make up half of the world. But they are not allowed to fulfil their potential as powerful drivers of economic development as well as of peace and security.

Let me just fill you in on the situation we have today:

- Women perform 66 percent of the world's work and produce 50 percent of the food. But they earn only 10 per cent of the income and own 1 percent of the property.

- 70 per cent of the world's poor population are women or girls.

- Every day, approximately 1000 women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. That adds up to about 350 000 deaths each year.

- We were this week witnessing a historic step in the history of the United Nation, as the Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff as the first woman ever opened the General Debate. At the same time - standing here, mid-2011, there are still countries who do not allow women to vote. And in only 28 countries has women's parliamentary

representation reached a critical mass of 30 percent or more. Only 19 women are leading their countries as elected heads of state or government.

And this is not fair. It is not just. And it makes no sense.

Mr. President.

To me, gender equality is first and foremost a question of ensuring equal rights for women and men. It is about giving all individuals – irrespective of gender – the same possibilities to education, to economic opportunities and to take part in society.

In the year of 2011, there are women who are still not able to enjoy equal rights.

They are refused the right to vote, inherit, work and even to drive a car. And at the end of the spectrum, women are subject to gender-based violence and rape as a weapon of war.

But shortfalls in these rights are not only the loss of the women affected. They are a loss to society as a whole. And I can tell you: This is very bad economic policy for the countries concerned.

Not least in these times of global economic crisis, it seems obvious that we must realize the full potential of all human resources.

I will give you a few examples. Closing the gap between male and female employment rates would have huge implications for the global economy. It would boost American GDP by as much as 9 per cent, Eurozone GDP by 13 per cent and Japanese GDP by 16 per cent.

But increased gender equality doesn't only have immediate economic benefits. It's also an investment for the future.

Evidence from a range of countries is clear. When women take greater control of the household income, more money is spent on the children's needs - such as food, health and education. The children grow taller, are less ill and get better jobs.

Moreover, when women take greater part in society - by shaping institutions or taking leading roles in politics or business life - there are clear improvements for the public good and less corruption. When they are present at the building of peace, results improve.

In short, I see gender equality not only as a crucial human rights issue, but also a question of smart economics. I would urge all representatives sitting in this room: Imagine what it would mean in terms of economic growth for your countries if women were allowed to fully participate in society.

Mr. President,

As technology develops, the world is changing. In one minute I can use my mobile phone to get hold of a friend on the other side of the globe or my children back home in Sweden. That is amazing.

But in one minute, we can also get a first-hand report on the situation in troubled parts of the world. We can get first-hand access to pictures of abuse and violence - taken by hidden mobile phones and for the whole world to see.

Today, ideas of freedom and democracy are spreading at the speed of sound. We have seen it in North Africa. We are seeing it in the Middle East. The Internet and new technology have laid out a high speed motorway. Heading towards democracy and freedom.

We can see that some are trying to put out road blocks. Repressive governments trying to quash the rights they fear.

Mr President,

The United Nations must play a leading role in embracing and maintaining these new roads towards democracy and freedom. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression recently concluded that there must be as little restriction as possible to online freedom of expression. He called this an “enabler” of other human rights.

Sweden – together with 40 other nations around the world – strongly supports his conclusion. We want to build an alliance for the freedom of the Internet. And we have launched a special Initiative for Democratisation and Freedom of Expression. So that we can urgently support human rights activists and agents of democratic change. The Internet is the new frontline in the fight for freedom across the world.

Mr. President,

In many countries, my own included, we take freedom for granted. In other countries, it's still a dream.

This year, we have witnessed courageous people in North Africa and the Middle East taking to the streets to fight for their dream. To fight for freedom, openness and democracy. For this, they must get our support. When there are threats of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity - when autocratic rulers like in Syria turn their guns on their own citizens - then the international community has a responsibility to protect civilians.

Sweden hopes to play its role in this decisive phase in the region. We are contributing to the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1970 and 1973 in Libya. We are providing substantial humanitarian support to several countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

And when the new governments turn to the crucial task of establishing democratic principles, rule of law and respect for human rights, then we are ready to continue our support and to do more. To see the Arab spring turn into a blossoming summer.

Mr. President,

The European Union is firmly committed to Israel and a Palestinian state living side by side with each other in peace and security.

We all want to see the peace process resume. Violations of international law must cease. Only then can a true and lasting peace be achieved.

Mr President,

The Horn of Africa is suffering its worst famine in 60 years. We are faced with a huge humanitarian disaster. And the international community must respond faster and better. Now.

Disasters such as the ones in Haiti, Pakistan and now on the Horn of Africa show the central importance of the UN in humanitarian action. The UN needs our full support to further improve the international response capacity.

Mr President,

In a globalised world, we are not just interconnected online. Together we share a planet with finite resources. And yet we consume as if there was no tomorrow.

I believe that sustainable development requires global solutions. In this respect, next year's Rio+20 meeting in Brazil will be very important. I am really hoping for a strong renewed political commitment for sustainable development.

We are also looking for concrete progress at the Durban climate conference in November. We know what we need. And we have known it for some time. Further reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. If not - we are simply not going to be able to turn the trends of global warming.

These are turbulent times. Some countries are suffering from financial and economic crises. Others are suffering from severe consequences of global warming. Yet others are building new societies as freedom and democracy have replaced dictatorships and repression.

More than ever there is a need for a well functioning global arena for international cooperation and conflict resolution - for the pursuit of sustainable economic, social and environmental development. The need for a strong United Nations based on political legitimacy, on justice, and on human rights is as strong as ever.

Sweden will do its utmost to support a strong United Nations through substantial contributions to humanitarian and development assistance and to its work for peace, security and human rights.

We also want to help revitalise the UN's work on disarmament and non-proliferation. Together with Mexico we will as chairs work hard on advancing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty.

We have also presented our candidature for a seat on the Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015. As a member of the Council, Sweden would contribute actively to making the Council a more efficient and active body. And to promoting universal enjoyment of human rights. Making rights real.

Mr. President,

This week we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of the Swedish Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. He played an important role in reforming and shaping the UN as we know it today. Let me conclude with these words from Dag Hammarskjöld:

“The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and its errors, its successes and its setbacks, can never be relaxed and never abandoned.”

This was true then. And it is true today.

Thank you Mr President.

