



## **94-09-07: Statement of Sweden, H.E. Ms. Inger Davidsson**

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AS WRITTEN

S W E D E N

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Address by Ms Inger Davidson

Minister of Public

Administration and Youth

We are gathered here to take decisions that will profoundly affect our  
 own lives and the quality of life of our children and their children.

The world's nations are interdependent and share a mutual responsibility  
 for achieving sustainable development. One fifth of mankind is  
 responsible for four fifths of the world's total energy consumption,

resource utilization and waste. The average family in Sweden has two children. Compared with a poor family in a developing country this corresponds from a resource utilization point of view to a twenty-child family. In a longer-term perspective existing production and consumption patterns are unsustainable. Consequently the richer segments of the world population have a special responsibility to bring about changes in production and consumption patterns conducive to sustainable development in their own countries.

Yet, we also know that the world population will increase dramatically by the middle of the next century. Also very poor societies will have to provide perhaps twice as many jobs and social services as today. Can the poorest societies meet the challenge entirely on their own? In all probability the answer is no. A massive international development effort is necessary. The situation in many parts of the world is further aggravated by forced migration, people seeking jobs and homes in areas where the carrying capacity of the environment and the social infrastructure is strained.

Sweden is one of a small group of countries that have well surpassed the UN goal of 0.7 percent of GDP for development assistance. We have already increased our development cooperation in the areas covered by the Plan of Action of this conference, such as sexual and reproductive health and support to women's organizations. It is our firm intention to strengthen our cooperation in this field.

Taking into account the needs arising out of this conference, it is imperative that many more countries realize the target of 0.7 percent. If all the OECD countries did, an additional USD 60 billion would be mobilized each year for development purposes. That would mean a doubling

of the efforts of today.

Having said this, however, I must also make it clear that a main responsibility for funding and action always lies with the national governments concerned. Aid can and should supplement such efforts but cannot take their place.

Mr. Chairman,

The Swedish government sees the empowerment of women as one of the most important policies on the agenda of this conference.

The empowerment of women must however be championed in its own right, not just as a means in a population policy. The competence and potential of both women and men must be recognized in all fields of society. Education for women is just one of many important policies emanating from such a view. Others are the woman's economic independence, her right to land, her right to credit and her sexual and reproductive rights on her own terms. In this context, the right of individuals and couples to make informed choices about the number and spacing of their children constitutes a cornerstone.

The empowerment of women will however not come about without corresponding changes in male behavior and attitudes; men must be prepared to abstain some of their power in order for power to be truly shared. Men also have to take their part in the work with home and children.

Partnership between men and women on an equal footing is fundamentally a democratic issue, as Prime Minister Brundtland pointed out in her keynote address at the opening of this conference. A democratic culture

and democratic values in society, responsible governance if you like, are linked to a democratic culture in the family. Respect for others, mutual rights and obligations, and a capacity to sort out conflicting interests must also be learned and trained in the family. It is vital that family values foster human rights, human dignity, democracy and equality between men and women.

Human rights, human dignity, respect for the individual and freedom of choice are central elements in Sweden's stance on the issues on the agenda here at Cairo.

I specifically wish to raise the issue of human rights in a gender context, because women are the victims in practically all societies of structurally defined violence, emanating from the unequal power relationship between men and women. Violence occurs also in the family. My government strongly urges the international community to implement the UN declaration on violence against women.

I also wish to place on record our condemnation of the selective abortion of female foetuses, the practice of female infanticide and female genital mutilation.

Mr. Chairman,

Much media interest in this conference has focused on the question of abortion. This has unfortunately been to the detriment of the other issues. The Swedish position is that we cannot idly accept the tens of millions of unsafe abortions that take place worldwide every year. They are induced by the women themselves or by backstreet butchers, resulting in deaths, sterility or morbidity for the women involved.

They furthermore often jeopardize the survival of the children that the woman already has. The victims of unsafe abortions are mostly poor and uneducated women and teenage girls; affluent women generally have a safe abortion option open to them.

Experience shows that abortions take place whether the national legislation permits them or not. Making abortions illegal hence does not solve the problem of unsafe abortion; on the contrary it increases maternal morbidity and deaths and removes the issue from the national statistics.

In Sweden we agonized over this question for decades, but in the 70's came to the conclusion that the abortion option in the early stages of a pregnancy should be open to the choice of the woman when she sees no other possibility. One main objective in our policy in this field has however been and continues to be a strong emphasis on preventive measures. Availability of services, information and education can reduce the abortion rate significantly.

In Sweden we recognize that the NGO's have played a decisive role for bringing about today's Swedish policy and society's acceptance of it.

I have no intention whatsoever of trying to impose Swedish views or legislation on this subject. Each society must find its own solutions to the alarming and unacceptable prevalence of unsafe abortions. My plea is simply this: Let us address this question squarely and recognize it for what it is - a major threat to women's health - and act accordingly.

Mr. Chairman,

Adolescents and youth are a key group for the concerns we are gathered here to discuss. They and their children are the agents of change and development. Not least important is the fact that attitudes affecting gender equity are developed during these formative years. The incidence of unsafe abortions, of sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS/HIV makes it even more imperative than ever that young people in society, both boys and girls, receive adequate and confidential guidance - not least through school - with regard to their sexuality, and that they have access to contraceptives.

The draft document of the conference brings up the concept of reproductive health. My government welcomes this and is also prepared to support the broad definition of this term put forward by the Director-General of the WHO. Our strong wish is that this conference will endorse the wider approach implicit in the word sexual and reproductive health. In the Swedish view it is necessary to see all the elements, including family planning, as part of this new concept.

Finally, I wish to end on a note of urgency and action. Few items on the international agenda are more important in the long-term than the one before us today. Let us who are assembled at this conference take the Plan of Action's issues seriously.

The only way we can do this is to translate them into concrete action, domestically and internationally. The time is now. The responsibility is ours.

Thank you.

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