



Sweden's Government Policies to Combat Trafficking and Protect Children's Rights

Seminar on

Trafficking with a Special Focus on Children

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Your Royal Highnesses, Eminences and Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

First of all, thank you for the invitation by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences and congratulations on such an important seminar, in beautiful surroundings. This seminar is a historic initiative. I am honoured to be part of this day. Together through dialogue we can really accomplish something for the way forward.

Today my thoughts are especially with the children and their families who lost their lives in the Mediterranean. We have now seen too many tragic events where migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children drown in the Mediterranean, as they attempt to make their way to Europe on unseaworthy vessels, operated by smuggling and trafficking networks.

Human trafficking is modern slavery indeed. The practice is a crime against humanity and a shameful wound which has no place in civil society, just as Pope Francis so explicitly stated.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by nearly every country in the world and is thereby a universal document. Sweden will strengthen children's rights by incorporating the Convention into our legislation. But much remains to be done before the Convention can be said to apply in practice worldwide. The rights of children are violated every day. The UN estimates that around 1.2 million children are victims of trafficking. Children are treated like narcotics and weapons, a commodity in the criminal underworld. Boys and girls are being sold and sadly the real figure is presumably far higher than the UN estimate.

According to Article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children - for any purpose or in any form. All children, girls and boys, have a right to be protected from human trafficking. The article is a safety net to ensure that no child is abducted or sold for any purpose. In addition, many countries have also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The protocol demands the States Parties to take necessary measures to criminalise and prosecute every form of sale of children.

Ever since the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was held in Stockholm in 1996, work against trafficking has been high on the Swedish agenda.

I am here today to speak about the Swedish Government's policies to combat trafficking and protect children's rights. Since 1999 it has been prohibited to buy sexual services in Sweden. The criminalisation of sex purchases has had an effect on the demand for sexual services and has also served as a barrier to traffickers and buyers to establishing a market for selling women and girls for sexual purposes in Sweden.

We believe that the Government is ultimately responsible for creating the best conditions for children and guaranteeing the rights of the child. Protection from violence and abuse is an essential requirement for the safety, confidence and wellbeing of children, as well as for their personal development. Boys, girls, women and men also have the right to bodily integrity, information and sexuality education. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are central to Swedish policies against sexual exploitation. This is something that is not only important for the individual; the whole of society gains from this - not least economically.

A society with fewer assaults, fewer unwanted pregnancies, fewer physical and psychological complications has much to gain. Experience tells us that the strengthening of rights and equal opportunities of women combined with well-developed systems for child care and elderly care contributes to a high labour market participation of women, better economic conditions and a sustainable fertility rate.

The Government's aim is that Sweden should be one of the best countries in the world to grow up in. Sweden's Government is also a feminist Government. This means that a gender equality perspective is vital in our efforts to protect all children; we want to protect every girl and boy from human trafficking, exploitation and sexual assaults.

Sweden has had four action plans to protect children from trafficking since 1998. The overall objective for the current Action Plan is that no child should be a victim of trafficking, exploitation or sexual abuse. The plan is expected to lead to:

- increased awareness among government agencies, professionals, the general public and, of course, children themselves;
- increased effectiveness in the work of the Government and other relevant stakeholders to protect children from these violations; and
- enhanced contributions by Swedish authorities to international cooperation on protecting children.

The Government has given the Stockholm County Administrative Board the assignment to coordinate, on a national level, the work against human trafficking in Sweden. The Board has very successfully created a structure to combat trafficking and should coordinate the work with important stakeholders, such as municipalities, county councils and authorities, and disseminate knowledge and methods related to combating child trafficking and exploitation. Collaboration with hotels, taxis, restaurants and international exchange is also part of the assignment.

As an example, we arranged a national information campaign 'Bring your Travel Courage' (Resekurage) in collaboration with the Swedish Police and World Childhood Foundation to raise awareness of sexual exploitation in conjunction with tourism and travel. The aim is to get Swedes who travel abroad for their holidays to contact the police if they see anything they suspect to be child sex tourism. We have a responsibility to protect children from acts of sexual abuse or exploitation committed by persons who are resident in our country, regardless of where such acts take place.

The Action Plan also consists of measures such as distributing tailored information to children who have been victims of crime and training material to professionals, as well as co-action within the European Union and with other countries. Sweden is actively working to identify interested countries to make bilateral agreements of cooperation to combat child sex tourism.

Even if our country has come a long way we are not satisfied. The Government is preparing for a new Action Plan for the years 2016-2018. Our prevention work has to be even better. For instance, we know that most perpetrators are men and in general all buyers of sexual services are men. Our measures must therefore reflect what we know for a fact.

The Swedish Government's aim is to start a continuous dialogue on the highest level between stakeholders, policy-makers and experts among the world's countries. Our purpose is to continuously, whenever it is possible, put trafficking and the protection of our children on the international political agenda. Sweden will continue to strengthen children's rights and improve their living conditions through both bilateral and multilateral development cooperation.

Your Royal Highnesses, eminences and colleagues,

As single individuals it is difficult to achieve real change, but together it is possible to really take steps forward. Let's make this seminar the starting point of collaboration for our children.

Thank you.