

SWEDEN



STATEMENT

by

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sweden fully associates itself with the statement made by Denmark on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

Today, Sweden reaffirms its strong commitment to gender equality and the rights and empowerment of girls and women. We do so with ever greater urgency. Since many challenges remain, it is increasingly clear how we together could tackle them if we commit to moving forward together: in the fight to eradicate poverty by ensuring property rights and the institutions of free markets, and in the fight against discrimination by vigorously defending and promoting gender equality.

Of the more than one billion women who live in extreme poverty in the world, 700 million can be found in rural areas, and of the 925 million people who are chronically hungry, 60 per cent are women. We face persisting and unacceptable gender disparities and gaps. The theme for this year's commission is therefore important and timely.

We know the challenges that face us, the pathways we need to take and the roadblocks we need to overcome.

We know that women perform two thirds of the world's work but they earn only 10 per cent of the world's income, and they own only 1 per cent of the world's property.

We know that women have less access to credit or other financial services, particularly in rural areas.

We know that women suffer more than men from poor health services, especially when it comes to sexual and reproductive health. Maternal mortality remains high, although some progress has been made. One thousand women die during pregnancy or as a result of childbirth-related complications around the world every day, a risk that is twice as high in rural compared with urban areas.

Across regions, women in rural areas have one thing in common: they have far too little access to property, productive resources and opportunities, and they face major constraints in exercising their rights. This is particularly true for young, poor or minority women, women with disabilities, or women who face discrimination and marginalisation due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Closing the gender gap in the fulfilment of human rights for everyone in rural areas would produce significant gains for society.

Sweden is firmly committed to this endeavour: as a member of this Commission, as a partner to UN Women, and by taking very seriously the task to mainstream gender equality, to work for the empowerment of women and girls – and to defend and realise their human rights. We believe that the UN Human Rights Council plays a

crucial role to this end, which is yet to be fully explored. Sweden has presented its candidature to the Council for the term 2013–2015. If elected, Sweden would pursue these objectives relentlessly.

Chair,

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the empowerment of rural women and their role in development and current challenges. Based on this report, we can and we need to agree that empowering rural girls and women is an essential part of the solution to the global challenges of our time, and an unmistakable part of the quest for a free and fair society. There is potential for reform in all countries in the world, including my own.

True, in Sweden, the main problem for rural women today is not hunger or extreme poverty. But less than a century ago, Sweden was an underdeveloped rural country marked by poverty and a lack of democratic rights and economic opportunities for women. We have come a long way, but barriers to women's full and equal economic opportunities in rural areas still exist. Promoting entrepreneurship, creativity and non-stereotypical ways of living is necessary to encourage modern women and men to stay in rural areas.

All over the world, rural development is not as rapid as it could be due to the inability of women and girls to fully enjoy their human rights, including the right to health and education, and to act as economic agents and drivers of development.

Protecting and promoting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls remains a challenge in many countries. In developing countries, nearly half of all girls under the age of 18 who live in rural areas end up in an early marriage or early pregnancy. This limits their education, their opportunities and choices, and, far too often, their ability to contribute productively to growth and sustainable development in their societies.

We know that with equal access to productive resources and services, rural women could produce 20 to 30 per cent more food, enough to lift 150 million people out of hunger. Women's contribution to food production also leads to improved nutrition and health for children.

Chair,

We know how to promote increased agricultural yields and rural development – greater investment in women farmers:

First, women's opportunities to own and control land and other property must be improved, as well as their access to credit, education and training.

Second, increased support must be given to education for women and girls and to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is fundamental both for their life choices and for their equal participation as economic agents.

Third, efforts must increase to fight stereotypical gender roles and gender-based discrimination and violence, beginning with young girls and boys.

The rural women of the world are a powerful force for change and key drivers of development. The Secretary-General's report shows what we ought to do and which pathways will lead to gender equality and women's empowerment. Let us together send a clear message – gender equality is a human right that has not yet been fulfilled. It is an objective in its own right, and at the same time a condition for the empowerment of rural women.

Thank you.

