



Ministry for Foreign Affairs

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Statement by Sweden's Foreign Minister Ann Linde at the opening session of the 2020 OSCE Mediterranean Conference

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

First of all, I want to direct myself to all our colleagues and friends in Vienna, after last night's terrorist attacks. I hope you are all well and safely at home. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families. We must all stand united against attacks on our open society.

Excellencies,

I want to thank all of you who have joined us today. We are living through one of the most difficult times in recent history. I want to offer my heartfelt condolences to all who have lost family members, friends and loved ones during these past months.

Next year, Sweden will take on the role as Chair of the OSCE. Our primary focus will be to go back to basics. Emphasis will

be on the fundamental tasks of the OSCE: to defend the European security order and to uphold the OSCE comprehensive concept of security. The comprehensive concept of security stipulates that political and economic security, human rights, democracy, and gender equality are interrelated. It highlights how economic, social and environmental issues are linked to security.

These priorities have also influenced our work as chair of the valuable *Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group* this year, and I am glad that we are gathering today to discuss what we together can do to strengthen our common security. The pandemic has shown the absolute necessity of international cooperation and solidarity and this partnership is a valuable platform for strengthening our regional dialogue as well as our cooperation on security.

This is not the time for protectionism and isolation. Solidarity and cooperation will be crucial for all of us in this situation, but especially so for countries affected by conflict, inequality, poverty and humanitarian crises, which face even tougher consequences. I look forward to our discussion this morning and to hear your views on how we can promote security in the OSCE Mediterranean region through sustainable development and economic growth. I especially want us to

draw on the lessons we have learnt about how this can be done during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During our time as Chair of the *Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation Group* this year we have focused on security topics of concern to us all: Information technology and the fight against human trafficking; Women, peace, and security, and; Youth engagement and participation to counter violent extremism and radicalization that may develop into acts of terrorism. I believe these discussions have shown that we have a lot to learn from each other, and that we share many of the same challenges.

I also look forward to the expert discussions later on today on how we can ensure women's economic empowerment and promote environmental cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic, as these topics are linked to promoting our common security, inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

Regarding women's economic empowerment, Sweden is working hard to ensure that the global response to COVID-19 includes a rights and gender perspective, in the short, medium and long term. This is crucial in order to 'build back better' and to leave no one behind.

There are numerous reports of increased gender-based violence and domestic violence when people are in quarantine, or just generally spend more time at home. Women dominate the health and caregiving sector globally, but they are paid less, their jobs are often less secure, and they have less access to social protection systems. Women's economic empowerment, in terms of labour market participation, participation in trade and access to financial services as well as ownership rights, will be crucial if we are to *build back better* and achieve sustainable development.

When it comes to environmental cooperation, we already see how climate change affects millions of women, men and children around the globe. This is particularly the case for the Mediterranean region, which is among the most affected and vulnerable in the world. Environmental contamination, water shortage and lack of “future proof” energy supply affect the lives of the hundreds of millions living around the Mediterranean. We need to pay more attention to the link between climate change and security, and demand better and more integrated analyses from the field. We need to make conflict prevention climate aware, and efforts to combat climate change conflict sensitive.

Our recovery strategies should be used as an opportunity to take on important reforms towards fulfilling the Agenda 2030

and the sustainable development goals, as well as the goals of the Paris agreement. We need to ensure that the recovery is based on green transition. Lack of action towards climate neutrality will bring about consequences and costs that by far exceed the transition costs.

We also need a democratic approach towards recovery. This includes ensuring good governance, strengthening civil society and the respect for human rights, including freedom of expression and information – online and off line – and everyone’s freedom of religion or belief. It also includes reducing inequalities and gender inequalities. We must not leave the most vulnerable behind as we tackle this crisis.

No one of us can succeed these efforts on their own. International cooperation and dialogue are needed. Sweden aims to support inclusive dialogue via *The Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa*, which serves as a platform for contacts and dialogue between on the one hand Sweden and the countries of Europe and on the other hand the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Also, the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination through interreligious and intercultural dialogues is key to preventing conflicts and increase tolerance and understanding across cultures and between regions.

Excellencies,

The COVID-19 pandemic is a historic catastrophe and our response to it has included unprecedented measures. When we strive to build back better, international cooperation will be key. I am glad that we are gathering here today to discuss how we together can promote security and sustainable development. I look forward to our discussion.

Thank you.

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