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**Statement by Senior Adviser Ms. Monica Andersson, Ministry for Foreign Affairs,  
Sweden  
on  
Session 4 – Fighting intolerance and discrimination against Muslims: facilitating  
integration and respecting cultural diversity.**

Last year, the Swedish government agency Living History Forum and the National Council for Crime Prevention together carried out a survey on attitudes to issues such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and homophobia among school children. The survey showed that anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and homophobia are serious and real problems in Swedish society – not merely in the margins. Since the 1990s, various groups representing racial ideologies have increased their scope of activities, and their communication channels have been enhanced through the internet and music. The survey shows us the need to regularly look into attitudes regarding intolerance in our respective nations, in order to better assess appropriate means to combat intolerance.

The most important target group, in a longer perspective, for work against intolerance is children and young people. Schools play an important role in forming values and opinions, and the responsibility to work with issues of democratic values is expressed in the Swedish school curriculum. The Living History Forum offers education on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia for teachers and other persons who work with children. The Forum often uses non-traditional methods for education and awareness-raising, such as theatre, events and film in its work. In 2005, the Forum will initiate a study on Islamophobia in order to get a clearer picture of the reasons for such intolerance.

However, to teach democratic values and human rights these rights and values must also be *practiced* in schools. This spring, the Swedish Government is presenting a legislative proposal before the Parliament for a law against discrimination and harassment in schools. The aim of the proposed law is to promote the equal rights of pupils and children and to counteract discrimination on the grounds of sex, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation or functional impairment. According to the suggested law, a pupil who has suffered discrimination or harassment will be able to claim reparation if a school has failed in its work to prevent discrimination and to protect the pupil. The law is proposed to enter into force on 1 January 2006.

To fight intolerance and to prevent prejudice we need to work with various tools; The basis of the society's work against all racism, xenophobia and discrimination must be clear and effective legislation. The fight against crimes committed with a racist or xenophobic objective is a high priority for Swedish law enforcement authorities.

The work performed by the Ombudsman against ethnic discrimination and Swedish Integration Board is central to the Swedish fight against discrimination and xenophobia. The Integration Board, among other things, supports the local anti-discrimination bureaux which play an important role in creating points of contact and support for those who have suffered

discrimination. The Integration Board also cooperates with organisations to fight intolerance. In 2004 it provided financial support for seven Muslim organisations, which formed the joint organisation “Forum for equal rights” with the aim of counteracting discrimination as one important task.

In the year 2002 the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs published the book “*Jalla! Let’s decorate the Christmas tree. An encounter with the Muslim cultural sphere.*” The book has been distributed free of charge to all upper secondary schools and all immigrant organisations and youth organisations. The aim with the book is to strengthen the dialogue between the Western and the Muslim worlds, and to create understanding for, and to prevent prejudices against people of Muslim cultural background.