

Statement by the Swedish Ambassador for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law Annika Ben David at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw
16 September 2019

Sweden aligns itself with the EU statement. In addition we would like to add a statement in our national capacity.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The freedom to choose, speak, think and love can never be taken for granted. Therefore, it gives me great pleasure to say a few words about the Swedish Government's recently launched focus area, called ***Drive for Democracy***. Its purpose is to initiate a renewed effort to support and strengthen democracy worldwide.

The background to this initiative is a growing concern about threats to democracy. Around the world, authoritarian leaders are gaining ground. Democratic principles and values are being threatened, freedom of expression and association are on the decline, democratic institutions are being weakened and the democratic space for civil society is shrinking.

The ***Drive for Democracy*** aims to respond to these developments and the initiative extends across foreign and security policy, development cooperation, as well as trade and promotion. Let me give you a few examples:

First, Sweden will stand up for democratic principles in all contexts, work to ensure that democracy is strengthened, and voice criticism against democratic deficits or risks of backsliding.

Second, we are stepping up our democracy assistance. Support to the promotion and strengthening of democracy is already one of the main areas of Swedish development cooperation but we are now redoubling our efforts in light of the current situation. This include support to democratic processes and election authorities, fighting corruption, but also to free and independent media and

democratic voices, such as civil society. Human rights and the rule of law are intrinsically linked to inclusive and democratic societies and are therefore key elements also when strengthening democracy.

Third, Sweden seeks to build new alliances to promote democracy worldwide. We need to strengthen the political engagement for democracy, and together with others share good practices and experiences of why we believe democracy is the best governing system.

Fourth, we are convinced that an equal society is a prerequisite for ensuring a well-functioning democracy. Without everyone enjoying equal opportunities and access to welfare, genuine participation in democracy is impossible. Increased social gaps prevents democracy to grow.

Fifth, as I already alluded to, democracy cannot flourish without respect for human rights. The ***Drive for Democracy*** is rights-based, and Swedish support to improved enjoyment of human rights, such as freedom of expression, assembly and association, is a central feature of the initiative.

Finally, gender equality is central to democracy and the ***Drive for Democracy*** and Sweden's *Feminist Foreign Policy* are mutually reinforcing. One important area where we will increase our attention and support is women's access to the political arena and their active participation in society building.

Swedish embassies and missions around the world play an important role in the design, implementation and impact of the ***Drive for Democracy***. However, conditions vary between countries and contexts. Our embassies and missions are encouraged to build on ongoing and planned activities and contacts, and to add new aspects that align with the direction of the ***Drive for Democracy***.

The ***Drive for Democracy*** is a key focus area for my Government, and we will work intensely in the coming years to provide much needed support to democracy's institutions, to its processes, and to its defenders.

Democracy cannot be taken for granted, and we must act decisively to defend it. Every day.

Thank you.