

24 October 2016

**General debate: Mr Krister Örnfjäder, Sweden, on:  
”Human rights abuses as precursors of conflict:  
Parliaments as early responders”**

*Distinguished Chair, Colleagues, Ladies and  
Gentlemen,*

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak about an issue which is very topical today, and one of the core democratic roles of parliamentarians. Taking action against human rights challenges – in different forms when they arise – is our duty as elected MP:s.

As representatives of citizen interests, we parliamentarians have a crucial oversight role, holding the executive accountable for the performance of

different sectors and when we see human rights violations.

This is a highly important topic and there is not enough time to deal with all questions in detail but I will take the opportunity to briefly give some examples on the Swedish Parliament's and Swedish agencies national and international responses on human rights issues, and how we are working to implement our citizens civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

To begin with, one instrument is a special government agency called the Equality Ombudsman. If anyone has been discriminated related to sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability or sexual orientation, or age, this can be reported to the Equality Ombudsman who examines the case. Anyone is free to submit a report to this agency. Moreover, there is also a National Audit Office

examining what central government funds are used for and how efficiently they are used on behalf of the public. The National Audit Office is an authority under the Parliament.

The Swedish Parliament's control system is another strong instrument, designed to help the Government and public agencies to work in an efficient manner, in conformity with the rule of law, and to help citizens feel that they can trust the way in which the public agencies exercise their powers. It is about monitoring and examining the work of the Government and public agencies at different stages, using the various instruments at its disposal.

Another example of the Parliament's oversight role, is the Foreign Affairs Committee's yearly review on human rights issues in other countries, where the

committee is examining cases in individual countries, on international human rights issues, womens', childrens', minorities and LGBTI rights and issues related to the International Criminal Court.

The Foreign Affairs Committee has also recently been dealing with a committee report on women, peace and security, it is an integral part in the peace- and security building measures in Sweden's foreign policy, based on the UN:s Security Council Resolution 1325.

Dear Colleagues, I would also like to mention a new government proposal suggesting that an independent institution for human rights, with the Swedish Parliament as the responsible authority, to be created in Sweden, and that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is incorporated into Swedish legislation.

In order to include the civil society to a larger extent, the Swedish government proposes in its budget – to be decided by the parliament - a number of measurements for 2017. Totally around 15 000 000 USD will be used on: creating more open meeting places for people from different cultures and backgrounds, increased availability on culture in especially socio-economic vulnerable areas. Civil society organizations and religious bodies are receiving extra funds to strengthen their activities towards asylum seekers and the establishment of immigrants. The intention is also to establish a gender equality agency. The Government will also present a new national strategy for the Parliament, including an action plan for 2017–2020, to prevent and combat men’s violence against women.

Distinguished colleagues, how can parliament's better draw on women's involvement and leadership in resolving human rights challenges?

Ultimately it is a question of human rights, democracy and justice, to include both women and men.

In Sweden we have come far, but we still have things to do. In the Swedish Parliament, the Speaker has created a Working Group for Gender Equality Issues. Sweden has a relatively high number of female MPs, 43.6 per cent after the election of 2014. In 1970, it was only 13 per cent.

Finally, I would like to mention that we are proud that Sweden has the first feminist government in the world, with a strong focus on gender equality, both in national and international work. In 2014, Sweden was the first country to declare that we will pursue a feminist foreign policy.

The policy aims at ensuring women's rights and participation in central decision-making processes, including in peacebuilding efforts and peace negotiations, and access to resources.

There are many aspects to discuss concerning this important topic. I hope we can continue our discussions, colleague to colleague. Thank you for listening.