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Statement of Government Policy presented by the Prime Minister, Mr Göran Persson, to the Swedish Riksdag on Tuesday, 18 September 2001

It began like any other day.

People in the suburbs woke up, dressed and ate their breakfast. Parents accompanied their children to school. The commuter and tube trains were packed.

Manhattan's skyscrapers were bathed in a pleasant late summer light. A few thousand New Yorkers took the lift to work in the World Trade Center.

It was 11 September 2001, exactly a week ago.

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Madam Speaker,
Honourable Members of the Riksdag,

The terrorist attacks in the United States were attacks on us all.

We want to build a world based on democracy and openness, a world in which we can live together in love, respect and mutual understanding.

We want people to be able to travel freely, visit other countries and cultures, exchange experience and knowledge, forge contacts and ties of friendship across frontiers.

These terrible deeds were a cruel reminder of the vulnerability of open societies. A reminder of how vulnerable democracy is when faced with powers prepared to challenge its very core – the sanctity of human life.

If democracy is not capable of putting a stop to terrorism, terrorism will be in a position to put an end to democracy.

All democratic forces in the world must unite in the struggle against terrorism.

We must rally in defence of the open society we want to continue to live in, in defence of democracy and human dignity.

We must all close ranks – and concentrate on that which unites us rather than the things that keep us apart. We must now come together across traditional frontiers and barriers.

Although the Swedish central public services appear to have worked well during the days following the attacks, there are grounds for a closer scrutiny of whether our society is equipped to fight international terrorism. The Government will take initiatives for such measures.

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Madam Speaker,

I would also like to express my deepest sympathy and that of my Government for all the young people and families affected by yesterday's terrible bus accident outside Sundsvall.

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Several important decisions are to be taken by this Riksdag in the year that lies ahead.

We will consolidate Sweden's position as a leading knowledge and research nation. We must strengthen Sweden's position as a welfare nation and as a world leader in gender equality. We must

ensure that Sweden can remain in the forefront in the transition to an economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development.

The fight against unemployment is the paramount task of every Social Democratic government. Unemployment and employment rate targets will be carefully monitored.

As a result of low activity in the American economy, the global economy was weak even before the terrorist attacks in the United States. It is too early to draw any definite conclusions about the impact of these events on the global economy. There are no plans at present to change the assessment of Sweden's economic position as set out in the Budget Bill to be presented on Thursday. But should developments lead to rising unemployment, the Government will not hesitate to implement new measures.

Sweden is well equipped to meet economic challenges in the event of a downturn in the international economy. Public finances are healthy and show surpluses. Inflation is low and the rate of employment high. Indeed this has been the aim of recent years' economic policy: to build security so that economic fluctuations would not lead to the Swedish people's again being obliged to bear the brunt of major savings packages and welfare cuts.

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Sweden shall be a country of social justice and security.

It is in our belief in people and their ability to develop in solidarity with one another that we shape our vision. The choice does not lie between growth and justice. We are convinced that development and equality are interdependent. Development will be stronger when all are given an opportunity to contribute to it and all partake of its fruits.

The many commitments made on behalf of growth and justice are beginning to tell in schools and classrooms, in hospitals and clinics, homes for the elderly and home-help services. The improvements we aimed for will now be felt by Swedish households.

Priority will be given to children. The right of children to safe leisure, recreation and play, laid down in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, will be consolidated, as will

their protection against violence and injury in accordance with Article 19. A child accident commission will be set up.

From the beginning of next year, the great majority of municipalities throughout the country will implement the system of maximum charges for pre-school care. Along with the increase in child allowances in recent years, this will give families with children more money for household expenses while ensuring that more children are able to attend pre-school. Pre-school will become universal and free of charge for children aged 4-5 in 2003. New parents will enjoy an extended period of parental insurance with improved benefits.

The Government's special schools initiative will put more teachers and other staff into schools. This will make smaller classes possible. The new study support system will take effect. The grant component will increase and the ceiling for grant eligibility will be substantially raised.

SEK 9 billion will be used to improve care of the mentally ill, strengthen primary care and raise the quality of elder care. An additional SEK 3.7 billion will go towards shortening waiting lists and improving access to care. A national action plan to reduce drug abuse will be presented.

It is proposed that the system of maximum charges in elder care enter into force next summer. Pensioners will be guaranteed a minimum sum of money of their own after all charges are paid. A system of protection against high costs for dental care will cover all people over the age of 65. A special tax cut will benefit a large majority of pensioners next year.

After Christmas the basic income tax deduction will go up. From next year employees will be compensated for three quarters of their personal social insurance contributions. A tax reduction for trade union dues will be introduced. In accordance with the intentions of the tax reform, the tax schedule will be changed so that fewer people will pay state income tax. Real estate tax will be reduced.

In the summer, improvements in unemployment insurance took effect. Both the upper limit for qualifying income and the minimum level of compensation were raised. More people now benefit from 80 per cent compensation in the event of unemployment. Further improvements in unemployment insurance will be made next year, the state of central government finances permitting.

In December the Government will present a Bill for a reform of the work injury insurance system. Major initiatives will be taken to defeat part-time unemployment. The activity guarantee will become a powerful tool to help the long-term unemployed and recipients of social assistance to obtain work. Efforts to combat homelessness and improve the position of the homeless will continue.

A wide range of measures in combination are designed to ensure that the target of halving the number dependent on social assistance between 1999 and 2004 is met.

Law and order will be reinforced. The Växjö Police College will be inaugurated in October. This will mean an increase in the number of police colleges from one to three during the present term of office. Nine hundred new police officers will be trained each year. The community policing reform will be carried through. Efforts by the Swedish Prison and Probation Service aimed at preventing recidivism in connection with serious crime and drug misuse will be stepped up. International police cooperation will continue to develop. Crime committed by young people must meet with a firm response, though also with supportive measures to prevent young people from becoming trapped in a criminal lifestyle. Protection for women exposed to violence and threats will be intensified. Stronger support will be provided to victims of crime, especially children and young people.

A gender equality perspective will be mainstreamed into all areas of government policy. This will involve challenging ingrained attitudes, working methods and norms. In the autumn the Government will present a handbook of methods in support of efforts to achieve gender equality in all sectors of society.

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Sweden shall be a nation characterised by cohesion and development.

Improvements will be made to our country's roads, railways, waterways and airports. Special resources will now be committed to remedying urgent deficiencies in the maintenance of roads and railways. An integrated programme for infrastructure modernisation will be presented. SEK 319 billion will be set aside as of 2004.

All education – from pre-school to postgraduate education – will maintain the highest possible international standards. Special funds will be set aside to maintain quality standards in pre-schools and provide further education and training for pre-school staff.

Efforts to maintain quality standards in compulsory school education will be intensified. Another 4 000 teachers will receive further training to become fully qualified. Mother tongue instruction will be strengthened. All pupils will receive the support they need to achieve knowledge targets. The additional resources being allocated to schools will mainly go to pupils who need extra educational support. A development plan for schools will be presented. A review will be undertaken of the upper secondary school system and the Education Act. Municipal and independent schools shall operate on equal terms. Decisions affecting schools must not be motivated by private gain.

Efforts in schools to instil fundamental values will be intensified. A democratic outlook cannot be commanded into existence. Democracy must be practised in the classroom. The importance of tolerance, respect and responsibility must be manifest in teaching and the school environment.

The expansion of higher education and the improved study support system will be accompanied by vigorous action to correct the skewed pattern of recruitment to universities and colleges. The long-term target is that half those born in any given year shall have embarked on a course of studies at university level by the age of 25.

The mobilisation of forces to support Swedish research will continue. The objective is to double the number of postgraduate qualifications taken within ten years. Sweden must retain its place at the forefront of development in biotechnology. Scrutiny of research ethics must become more transparent and the general public be given greater access and influence.

Work on regional growth agreements will continue. Some types of companies in those parts of the country at the greatest geographical disadvantage will be eligible for tax relief. Efforts must be made to ensure equal conditions for enterprise throughout the country. In certain cases central government initiatives are needed to augment the supply of capital. Important contributions come from EU structural funds. Action will be taken to support the tourist industry. Distance learning will undergo vigorous expansion. A cyber university will be established.

More effective rules will be drawn up for competition with the consumer perspective in mind. More efficient markets lead to lower prices, better quality and a wider selection of goods and services. Cartels will be vigorously opposed. A merger between the Swedish Competition Authority and the Swedish Consumer Agency is under consideration. The Government will initiate a comprehensive, open-minded evaluation of the radical deregulation of and changes to public sector activities carried out in recent years.

Measures will be taken to stimulate SMEs. The work on a system of continuing professional development for individuals will be further pursued. More action will be taken to promote exports to strategic markets and special initiatives will take place in industries that are expected to be particularly important in future, such as biotechnology and ICT.

Uniformly high welfare standards must be maintained throughout the country. There must be far-reaching equalisation between local authorities in Sweden, in a spirit of solidarity. Municipalities whose population is declining particularly fast will receive enhanced support to guarantee good social services. Continued economic support will be given to aid in the restructuring of municipal housing companies that own many empty dwellings. Central government will strengthen its commitment to municipal housing companies.

Strong country-wide growth can only be achieved if growth regions can continue to develop. Better solutions for traffic in the major urban areas will be presented. The national policy on urban areas will be further pursued. Segregation in our major cities must be overcome.

Housing construction must increase. At least 25 000 new dwellings need to be built each year, and this effort needs to be sustained over a number of years. Close to SEK 4 billion will be invested in housing construction over the next five years.

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Madam Speaker,

This summer Gösta Berling danced a reel on the boards of the Storyteller Barn in Sunne. King Lear took stock of his life and deeds under the stars among the Gotland ruins.

The highly acclaimed Circus Cirkör has taken up residence in Botkyrka and is training local youth in circus arts.

From one end of the country to the other, members of local associations are busy setting up exhibitions and learning more about contemporary Swedish history – our industrial cultural heritage.

Magic spells, owl post and enchanted swords are currently captivating a new generation of readers. More books are being sold in Sweden than for many years.

New young film-makers have taken us on tours of the suburbs, to scenes of first love, to the communes of the 70s, and the audiences keep on growing.

Culture is reaching more groups in our society than ever before. This positive trend must be strengthened.

Greater support must be given to regional music and theatre institutions, independent theatre and dance groups and to the Society of Art Promotion and the *Skådebanan* organisation. School libraries will receive extra resources. The preservation of our cultural heritage will be enhanced. Press subsidies will be increased and special support will be introduced for Saturday delivery of daily newspapers. Support will be made available for the development of an organisational structure for Swedish design. Multicultural activities will receive particular support, as will language and culture activities among our national minorities – the Sami people, Swedish Finns, Tornedalers, Roma and Jews. A centre for film conservation will be set up in Grängesberg. All Swedish book lovers must benefit from the substantial reduction in VAT on books.

The Government will continue with its long-standing investment in culture. The reasons are obvious.

To quote the words of a young reader of the magazine for children and young people,
Kamratposten:

“If we want to be happy, imagination is the most important thing in the world.
It makes us wiser, more interesting and helps us better understand the
problems of the world.”

* * *

The will to work is the nation's primary asset. Everyone's knowledge and creativity must be turned to account. All discrimination in the labour market must end. Technology for adapting workplaces to the needs of the disabled must be fully exploited.

Modern working life must make provision for people's requirements and their situation in life. Stress must be reduced. Employees must have a greater say in decisions affecting their jobs and working hours. Full-time employment must be the norm and part-time work an option. All women and men must have the right to jobs they can live on. Involuntary part-time employment and hourly-paid employment will be actively discouraged. Wage discrimination will be combated.

National health targets in working life will be defined. Health audits will be tested to determine whether they provide a suitable model for improving health in working life. Traditional efforts to improve the work environment will be bolstered. The trend towards more and longer absences from work due to illness must be arrested. Stronger economic incentives will be introduced to encourage employers to take greater responsibility for working conditions and prevention and rehabilitation. The Government will invite the social partners to take part in talks and joint efforts aimed at combating ill-health.

The public sector must set an example in making working life more humane. Sweden needs more welfare workers. Their working conditions must improve to the point where many more young people choose to make a career in the social services.

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Madam Speaker,

Sweden's development must not only be economically and socially sustainable; we must also build an ecologically sustainable society.

Growth generated through processes that impair human health and the quality of life, destroy the environment or deplete natural resources is not true growth; long-term human, ecological and social costs will always outweigh the short-term profits.

The close connection between health and the environment will receive particular attention. Vigorous measures will be taken against hazardous chemicals. Initiatives will be taken to improve the indoor environment. Indoor air or building materials must not constitute a health risk in our homes, the workplace, schools or child daycare centres.

Food production must be safe, sustainable and ethical. Sweden will press for the reform of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy. Animal protection will be strengthened and an animal protection authority established.

Biological diversity in our seas, forests and farmlands must be guaranteed. Especially valuable natural environments, habitats and animal species will be given permanent protection.

Climate policy will receive top priority both at national level and in international cooperation within the EU and the UN. There must be a reduction in the level of greenhouse gas emissions in Sweden. The Kyoto protocol will be ratified. Preparations for the crucial World Conference on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg next year are well under way. The Government's climate policy will be supported by a continuation of the green tax shift. Taxes on carbon dioxide emissions and electricity consumption will be raised, while taxes on labour will be lowered.

New and more market-based financial instruments will be introduced to assist the promotion of renewable energy resources and more efficient energy and resource utilisation. Sweden will continue to contribute actively to the development of the single European energy market, particularly in the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region. The second reactor at Barsebäck will be closed down as soon as the conditions laid down by the Riksdag have been met. According to government estimates, this will be the case before the end of 2003.

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Madam Speaker,

Forty years ago today, the then UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld fell defending the right of all people to live in peace and freedom. To this day the memory of Dag Hammarskjöld continues to inspire us in our firm commitment to a world free from war and oppression.

Sweden must be a force for global justice.

Development will never be sustainable until all countries and all people have a share in it. Although total global prosperity is increasing, the gap between rich and poor continues to grow. Democracy, prosperity and human rights must be for the benefit of all. But with greater opportunities comes greater responsibility. The governments of the world are committed to halving poverty by 2015.

Sweden's policy for global development will be reinforced. Development assistance is approaching the target of 1 per cent of GDP. Efforts to relieve third world debt will continue. Substantial support will be extended to the new UN global AIDS and health fund.

Open, free trade based on agreed ground rules is the most effective instrument for achieving sustainable development and widespread economic progress. Sweden will make every effort to ensure that World Trade Organisation negotiations focusing on the needs of developing countries can be initiated in November.

Work on a Swedish globalisation strategy will be completed. Democratic counterbalances are needed. Consideration will be given to measures aimed at creating a robust international financial system, preferably in collaboration with the EU and other international bodies.

In all international forums, the Government must join with progressive forces to actively promote progress towards greater international justice.

The role and tasks of the UN are growing. In a time of vigorous internationalisation and increased mobility, the need for a common set of values is greater than ever. Supreme responsibility for securing global peace and human rights rests with the UN and its Security Council. Sweden must do everything in its power to ensure that the UN is respected by all countries, operates effectively and receives sufficient funds.

The Swedish EU presidency was a success and has generated greater knowledge in Sweden about European cooperation. Broad popular debate on the future of the Union will be encouraged. With the resolutions adopted *inter alia* at the EU summit in Stockholm as a basis, the Government will seek to contribute to economic reform and full employment in Europe. It is in Sweden's interest that the introduction of euro banknotes and coins proceeds successfully. EU cooperation in the judicial sphere will be intensified. Sweden shall have a generous and humane refugee and immigration policy in the context of European cooperation.

EU enlargement and the integration of Russia in the European project gives us a historic opportunity to put an end once and for all to the division of Europe into East and West. The Government will press for the implementation of enlargement in accordance with the timetable laid down at the EU summit in Göteborg. Trade, development assistance and crisis management will be important elements in the development of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Ties within our neighbourhood, with the Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region, will be strengthened. As President of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 2001–2003, Sweden will focus attention on the development of a vast region rich in natural resources.

Sweden's security policy – non-participation in military alliances, making it possible for our country to remain neutral in the event of war in our vicinity – has served us well. Recent events illustrate once again that threats to our security may take many forms.

The Government will seek broad support for Sweden's security policy based on non-participation in military alliances. The constructive discussions with representatives of the parliamentary parties on the formulation of this policy will continue.

The reform of Sweden's total defence continues. The national total defence service will be modernised.

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This year, universal suffrage is 80 years old.

One man, one vote – democracy rests on this fundamental idea. It is based on the principle of the equal value of all human beings, the inviolability of every individual. It is the greatest and most beautiful concept of our time.

The terrorist attacks on the United States again make us acutely aware:

Democracy can never be taken for granted.

It must be won over and over again.

The Government will persevere in its exertions to disseminate knowledge, promote research and preserve the memory of the Holocaust in order to strengthen democracy and uphold human dignity. The memory of the Holocaust not only gives us an opportunity to learn from the dark side of history. This tragic story also contains shining examples, the very examples we need in our present endeavours to strengthen democracy.

One such, who deserves to be remembered for all time for his indefatigable efforts to defend human dignity, is Raoul Wallenberg. The Government will appoint a commission to examine the actions of those responsible for foreign policy in the Government Offices in the Raoul Wallenberg case.

A new authority – the Forum for Living History – will be established in Stockholm in 2003. Taking the Holocaust as its point of departure, it will be responsible for democracy, tolerance and human rights issues. This authority will be based in Stockholm but will operate throughout the country.

The annual intergovernmental conference, Stockholm International Forum, was held in January 2001. Its theme was *Combating Intolerance*. The event marked a major international drive to enhance preparedness to fight anti-democratic forces and intolerance in all their manifestations. A further international conference to be held during the first half of 2002 will signal the Government's continued mobilisation of forces to counter ethnic conflicts and prevent genocide in the future.

Madam Speaker,

The equal dignity of all human beings has been enshrined in international conventions and national legislation all over the world. But legislation cannot produce the most important piece of the puzzle.

Democracy is made up of people like you and me.

The strength of democracy is determined in the meeting between people. Democracy does not only confer rights. It also entails obligations.

Each and every one of us must always refuse to choose indifference or oblivion.

Each and every one of us must take an active stand.