



Making the case for democracy

The last thirty years of democratic advances have been eradicated. This means that the global level of democracy is back to where it was before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Development and democracy are interlinked, and we must not take either of them for granted.

The democratic decline constitutes a real threat to sustainable development, global peace and the health of the planet that we share. This threat is reflected in the inaction on the climate crisis, the increasing number of wars, economic downturns, growing inequalities and the pushback on gender equality and human rights.

It's time to make the case for democracy.

New research from the V-Dem Institute, a global independent research institute, shows that democracy outperforms autocracy. We would like to highlight four vital and evidence-based conclusions:

1. The return of democracy as a norm would significantly strengthen global peace and security

- Democracy promotes peace. Democracies do not wage wars against each other.
- Democracy promotes stability. Civil wars are much less likely in democratic countries and, when they do occur, they are less deadly.
- More democracies in the world will lead to fewer wars. Russia's aggression against Ukraine would probably not have happened if the level of democracy in Russia had been higher.

2. Democracy is critical to mitigating the environmental and climate crisis

- Democracies have almost a 20 per cent higher policy commitment to climate change mitigation and adopt stricter national environmental policies than do autocracies.
- Democracies are better equipped to implement the Paris Agreement.

3. Democracy is vital for economic and social development

- Economic growth is generally higher in democracies than in autocracies. Countries that democratised increased their GDP per capita by about 20 per cent in the 25 years following democratisation.
- Democracy provides mechanisms for more equitable growth that reduces poverty.
- Democracies have fewer and less severe financial crises.
- Life expectancy increases when countries democratise. Infant mortality is markedly lower in democracies.
- Democracies provide 23 per cent more safe water access, 35 per cent more child immunisation and up to 40 per cent more electricity access than autocracies.

4. Democracy promotes gender equality

- Democracy increases women's political participation and representation.
- Women's political empowerment and peace are closely linked. The annual risk of civil conflict drops from roughly 30 per cent in the least gender equal country to around 5 per cent in countries where women are fully empowered.
- Gender equality is much more likely to be the norm in democratic countries.

The worrying trend of democratic backsliding around the world erodes democratic norms and institutions; it weakens checks and balances on power and restricts people's ability to enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We need to take collective action to protect democracy, now.

We will intensify our efforts to make the case for democracy as a global norm. Intergovernmental platforms for cooperation among democracies, such as the Summit for Democracy and International IDEA, are vital. We will seek to build stronger alliances – across regions – and work together for democracy.

We need to make the case for democracy, because democracy delivers – for all of us.

Denmark:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Jeppe Kofod

Finland:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Pekka Haavisto

Iceland:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir

Norway:

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms Anniken Huitfeldt

Sweden:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms Ann Linde

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Government Offices of Sweden

Joint op-ed by 18 foreign ministers on the fight against impunity for crimes committed in Syria

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Ten years ago, millions of Syrians took to the streets of Dara'a, Aleppo and Damascus, calling for democracy and respect of their fundamental rights and basic freedoms. The brutal response by the regime triggered over the span of a decade one of the most serious criminal enterprises and humanitarian crises since the Second World War resulting in more than 400 000 deaths and in countless violations of human rights.

More than half of the Syrian population have had to leave their homes, and more than 6 million have fled their country to escape the regime's atrocities. Tens of thousands have been forcibly disappeared, their families left without any information as to their fate or whereabouts.

The Syrian regime has used chemical weapons against its own people repeatedly, as the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have proven beyond doubt. The regime has consistently refused to provide explanations to international investigation teams. But the survivors of its attacks are here to bear witness to what they have seen and suffered.

We will not remain silent in the face of the atrocities that have taken place in Syria, for which the regime and its external supporters bear the main responsibility. Many of these crimes, including the ones committed by Daesh and other armed groups, may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is everyone's responsibility to fight impunity and demand accountability for the crimes committed in Syria regardless of the perpetrator.

It is a matter of justice for victims. Given the seriousness of the crimes, we continue to call for the International Criminal Court to be allowed to

investigate crimes alleged to be committed in Syria and prosecute the perpetrators. To thwart the strategy of those blocking Security Council referral to the Court, we are working to ensure the facts are documented, pending examination by the competent judges. We therefore supported the creation of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, which collects and preserves evidence for future proceedings. These efforts are essential. We also support the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, which documents human rights violations in the Syrian conflict.

It is critical that these violations, which have been documented so thoroughly, come to an end immediately. We are also determined to enforce all international norms to protect the rights of all Syrians, as demonstrated by the recent action initiated by the Netherlands to hold Syria to account for breaching the UN Convention Against Torture. National courts, some of which have already opened judicial proceedings, play an important role in this. Prosecutions and final judgements have already been brought against perpetrators in several of our countries. Already in 2016, courts in Sweden started prosecuting grave crimes committed in Syria. Last month, a court in Koblenz, Germany, handed down a historic first judgment against a former member of the Syrian intelligence services for abetting crimes against humanity. Judicial proceedings are also underway in France, and a complaint was recently filed in Paris for the chemical attacks committed by the Syrian regime against its people.

The European Union has adopted targeted sanctions against individuals and entities close to the regime that are behind the repression of the Syrian people. We reject the regime's narrative that these sanctions are to blame for the suffering of the Syrian people. It is the regime's blatant neglect and mismanagement of the economy, which has led to the current economic crisis facing Syrians.

Today, we also need to provide solutions to the tragedy of detainees and more than 100.000 disappeared. It is essential for the United Nations to dedicate all the energy required to achieve tangible results, first and foremost from the Syrian regime.

Fighting impunity is not only a question of principle, it is also a moral and political imperative, and a matter of security for the international community. The use of chemical weapons, in any circumstances, is a threat to international peace and security. In response to chemical attacks, we have mobilized all competent institutions, guardians of the CW prohibition norms.

OPCW teams have carried out fully independent investigations. To complete this considerable work, we launched the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, bringing together 40 States and the European Union. This initiative has made it possible to condemn those involved in the development or use of chemical weapons. And we will not rest until they have been punished for their crimes.

Lastly, the fight against impunity is a prerequisite for rebuilding lasting peace in Syria. Without a complete and verifiable end to human rights violations and abuses, the people of Syria cannot look forward to a bright future. Without accountability for the crimes committed, Syria will be unable to reconcile with its past.

We commend the heroic efforts of human rights defenders, NGO personnel and civil society who risk their lives to bring to light the truth about the crimes committed in Syria. We offer them protection, where possible, and our legal systems are working actively to prosecute those responsible for serious crimes.

Full light must be shed on this decade of atrocities. Justice for victims is essential to rebuild a stable, peaceful Syria, based on a credible and viable political solution in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

Our countries are committed to ensuring that war criminals and torturers will not go unpunished. Their crimes will not win over the Syrian peoples' aspirations for dignity and for justice.

The article is signed by the foreign ministers of Sweden, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and the Netherlands.

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Human rights and democracy key to leaving no one behind in global fight against COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to accelerate the global trends of democratic backsliding and weakening respect for human rights. It is intensifying existing inequalities, hitting those who are already marginalised, subjected to discrimination and living in poverty the hardest.

The Nordic governments advocate international cooperation, solidarity, human rights and democracy in fighting the pandemic. Disproportional response measures may have serious and far-reaching repercussions for human rights and democratic principles. We are concerned that some governments are taking advantage of the pandemic by using it as a pretext for violating human rights, shrinking the democratic space and redrawing the global playing field.

Thankfully, we have seen the international community act. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has led the way by calling for a global ceasefire so the world can focus on fighting the pandemic, and by placing human rights at the forefront. The UN human rights system, the UN humanitarian and development system and the World Health Organization have played leading roles in addressing the important challenges of COVID-19.

In support of such efforts, our five governments are striving to make sure that human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality are at the centre of the immediate and long-term global response. We must build back better and greener, and we are ready to show leadership in strengthening international cooperation in the years to come.

To that end, we need to do four things:

We must mobilise internationally. The COVID-19 pandemic is a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis. Through the Sustainable Development Goals, the international community has committed to leaving

no one behind. We must uphold this commitment and ensure that all measures respect human rights.

We must ensure transparency and access to reliable information. The voices of independent media and civil society, including human rights defenders, must be protected and promoted. Their monitoring and reporting will contribute to holding governments accountable. It is also imperative that we counter disinformation and propaganda, and work closely with the media, tech companies, the private sector and civil society, as well as other stakeholders.

We must ensure a gender transformative perspective in the global response. The pandemic is linked to increased levels of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices. Also, the full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) – such as access to modern contraceptives, safe and legal abortion and comprehensive sexuality education – has worsened considerably.

The burden that COVID-19 places on health care systems must not be used as an excuse to restrict sexual and reproductive health and rights services for all women and girls. We stand together to remove structural discrimination and will continue to promote women's economic and political empowerment and their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Finally, we must remain vigilant to ensure that international standards and principles do not slip. Any action to fight COVID-19 must not undermine international law, democracy or democratic institutions.

Now is the time to mobilise to protect and strengthen the multilateral system and the rules-based international order. The multilateral institutions need political and financial support. And the public's trust in democracy and democratic institutions needs to be reinforced.

Today, we will have a discussion with leading representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the OSCE and civil society. Together, we are backing our words with action, taking the lead in making sure human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality are at the heart of the world's response and recovery.

We are prepared to share the Nordic experience of building trust through combining leadership with transparency, and cooperation between national

and local government institutions as well as with civil society. We are also prepared to use our voice and experience whenever human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality come under pressure.

Responding to the pandemic must not come at the cost of weaker democracies or more human rights violations. On the contrary, an approach based on democracy, gender equality and human rights is key to fighting COVID-19 and realising the 2030 Agenda.

Denmark:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Jeppe Kofod

Minister for Development Cooperation, Mr Rasmus Prehn

Finland:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Pekka Haavisto

Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade, Mr. Ville Skinnari

Iceland:

Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Cooperation, Mr Gudlaugur Thór Thórdarson

Norway:

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms Ine Eriksen Søreide

Minister of International Development, Mr Dag-Inge Ulstein

Sweden:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ms Ann Linde

Minister for International Development Cooperation, Mr Peter Eriksson

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Government Offices of Sweden

Yemen needs international help to escape tragedy

The writer is foreign minister of Sweden. Foreign minister Heiko Maas of Germany and foreign secretary Dominic Raab of the UK co-wrote this article, which was published in Financial Times on 1 July 2020.

After the Arab spring, it seemed that Yemen would follow a path of peaceful, political change. Civil society blossomed, and Yemenis of all affiliations, including women and young people, took part in shaping the country's future. Today, after six years of war, this hope has almost been extinguished. Yemen is on the brink of collapse.

Covid-19 is stretching Yemen's fragile healthcare system to breaking point. According to modelling by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Yemen may have surpassed 1 million Covid-19 cases last week, with the caseload likely to double every four to five days. [LINK?](#)

We have a global responsibility to ease the suffering of the Yemeni people. We — the foreign ministers of Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom — would like to share how we think the international community can contribute to peace.

First, a nationwide ceasefire and a political settlement remain Yemen's best defence against Covid-19. Following UN Secretary General António Guterres' call for a worldwide ceasefire in response to Covid-19, the Saudi-led coalition announced a unilateral ceasefire in April. Unfortunately, the Houthis have not reciprocated and fighting has continued. The Houthis have launched ballistic missiles towards Saudi Arabia, including at civilian targets, as recently as last week, recklessly endangering civilian lives. There is no time for further delay as civilians continue to suffer and die. The international community must press all actors to accept the UN proposal for a ceasefire. This should be the start of a political process — and the full participation of women must be ensured.

Second, humanitarian assistance needs to be delivered to all Yemenis who need it. To do that the UN now urgently needs more funding. Together, our three countries recently pledged an additional \$365m to support UN humanitarian work in Yemen this year. Other countries must step up and donate generously and quickly. We must also challenge any obstacles that continue to prevent humanitarian agencies from effectively operating in Yemen. This is particularly the case in northern areas of the country controlled by the Houthis. The Covid-19 response can only stand a chance if all Yemeni parties lift their restrictions on aid.

Third, we need to encourage implementation of existing agreements. This includes the Stockholm Agreement, which calls for a mutual withdrawal from the port city of Hodeidah, and the Riyadh Agreement. If properly implemented, the commitments previously agreed by the parties would bolster UN efforts to achieve comprehensive peace.

Fourth, for Yemen to effectively recover from Covid-19, its already fragile economy must be kept alive. The indirect consequences of the coronavirus could be even more severe than the direct impact. In particular, Yemen's partners need to support the government of Yemen to pay public sector salaries - not least for medical staff - and to implement urgent economic reforms.

And lastly, we expect full respect for international law, including humanitarian law and human rights from all actors. All parties have to ensure civilians are protected in this cruel war. This also includes protection for religious minorities, women, children, journalists and political prisoners. We call on the Houthis to implement their announcement to release members of the Baha'i faith. The supply of weapons to the Houthis, including weaponry of Iranian origin, is a violation of the UN arms embargo, as evidenced by the UN Panel of Experts, and only extends the conflict. This must stop.

We are ready to help once an agreement is reached to end the conflict and to reverse the fragmentation of the country. A united international community must stop those who seek to extend the conflict for their personal benefit. We envisage an agreement based on shared power, compromise, and the rule of law. Two of us represent member states of the EU, and we encourage it to step up its role in Yemen.

The Yemen that emerges from a peace agreement needs to play a constructive and active role in the region — contributing to the security of its immediate neighbours, Saudi Arabia and Oman. Our three countries stand

ready to assist Yemen's transition into a positive force for regional security.

Under the cloud of Covid-19, Yemen is facing an enormous tragedy. It is high time the international community unites in support of its people. Yemen could be transformed. Instead of being defined by suffering and as a threat to regional and international security, Yemen could become a model for other fragmented states in conflict and a catalyst for enhanced security in a region of divergent interests. We stand ready to work with and support Yemen to achieve these humanitarian and strategic goals.

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Ministers: Global cooperation should be strengthened

Opinion piece by Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde, Minister for International Development Cooperation Peter Eriksson and Minister for Foreign Trade and Nordic Affairs Anna Hallberg. Published in Svenska Dagbladet on 20 April 2020.

The coronavirus crisis is not a time for less cooperation, closed doors or protectionism. Now is the time for more international cooperation, write government ministers Ann Linde, Peter Eriksson and Anna Hallberg.

International cooperation is needed to manage the crisis. The spread and impacts of the coronavirus are posing difficult challenges for all of us. The world is in crisis management mode. Country after country is launching stimulus packages. Borders have been closed and flights have been cancelled. International systems are being challenged. We know that international cooperation is required to beat the pandemic and manage its impacts. International efforts must also be maintained to protect democratic and free societies, and to safeguard trade and jobs in Sweden.

The rapid spread of the coronavirus shows how closely interconnected countries are. It is not strange that the world's countries have initially focused on responding to the emergency at home. It is the primary responsibility of every government to ensure the security and well-being of its citizens. But viruses don't care about national borders. What happens in other countries affects us.

There are forces that want to benefit from the situation. We see a risk of anti-democratic forces filling the vacuum as normal, structured international exchange slows down or is put on hold. Some see an opportunity to weaken international cooperation and redraw the global playing field.

The world is not taking a break. We will push to promote our values and

interests – both during and after the coronavirus crisis. Sweden will continue to push for security, democracy and human rights. We will continue to give one per cent of our GNI to development assistance, and we will be at the forefront of free, fair and sustainable trade. The pandemic brings many issues to a head, exacerbates conflicts and creates additional challenges.

Democracy and women's human rights must be protected. To respond to the crisis, many countries have introduced draconian measures. In certain cases, the fight against the pandemic is being used as a pretext to silence political opposition, journalists, civil society and human rights defenders. This is why our Drive for Democracy is even more important than before. We have taken the initiative to bring together high-level representatives of the UN, the EU, the Council of Europe and the OSCE to contribute to the protection of democratic principles and human rights in this new environment. Our embassies are tasked with monitoring how the pandemic is affecting democracy.

International cooperation is required to combat disinformation. We are working together in the EU to strengthen efforts to counter disinformation, and we have stepped up our efforts to deal with coronavirus-related issues. The Swedish Institute and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency are working to counter inaccurate information about our response to the pandemic.

The global security situation is impacted by the pandemic. A worldwide ceasefire is needed to enable a focused response to the pandemic. Sweden therefore backs UN Secretary-General António Guterres' appeal for a global ceasefire. We are actively working with the parties to the Yemen conflict, among others, to urge them to heed the UN's call, as now seems to be happening. Security threats during the pandemic must be taken seriously and we are working closely with others to counter increased threats.

The pandemic will hit poor countries and the most vulnerable. Sweden has already contributed SEK 40 million to the WHO Contingency Fund for Emergencies and SEK 100 million to the UN's major humanitarian response plan to support the world's most vulnerable countries. This is crucial for a rapid and coordinated international response to the impacts of the pandemic. In the EU, we have also worked to increase support to our Eastern Partnership neighbours, and for EU coordination of the response to Africa's management of the pandemic. Sweden provides support to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to ensure that the whole world will benefit from new vaccines. We are now looking at how Swedish development cooperation can increase

efforts in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

According to an Oxfam report, half a billion people could be pushed into poverty as a result of the pandemic. We must ensure that financial support packages benefit everyone and that we build a more sustainable and equitable economy over the long term. The Government's Global Deal work, international development cooperation and better conditions for trade union activities around the world will be even more important.

Cooperation is needed to help those who are stranded abroad. Many Swedes have managed to return to Sweden on their own, which shows that requiring travellers to take personal responsibility works. However, in some situations this has not been possible, and so far more than 4 900 people have been able to return to Sweden thanks to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' cooperation with other countries, airlines and tour operators. Close cooperation between the Nordic foreign ministers means we are helping each other bring back home our Nordic citizens around the world. We are also working cooperatively in the EU to help each other's citizens return home.

The EU must be a strong global actor. Amid global concern, the EU needs to take a leading role in pushing for global action. Sweden supports the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borell. By acting together and collectively, the EU can make a big difference.

Trade needs to work even in emergency situations. We cannot possibly produce all healthcare products and medicines here in Sweden. To protect health and jobs, Sweden is working hard to ensure that both the EU single market and world trade work effectively even during the coronavirus pandemic. To increase the supply of essential goods, Sweden has pushed through the proposal to suspend EU tariffs on medical equipment.

Nordic cooperation should be enhanced. As each country is now making decisions to protect its population, we are tackling the challenges through close dialogue – and we are helping to minimise the adverse impacts for each other and our citizens living in border regions. Nordic cooperation plays a major role in the emergency we are in, and it will be crucial to our long-term efforts to manage the impacts of the pandemic.

The coronavirus is presenting us with major new challenges. We are experiencing something unprecedented in modern times. Our strong conviction is that Sweden's international engagement is important both for

solving the coronavirus crisis and for contributing to security, sustainability and welfare. This is not a time for less cooperation, closed doors or protectionism. Now is the time for more international cooperation.

Ann Linde (Social Democratic Party)
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Peter Eriksson (Green Party)
Minister for International Development Cooperation

Anna Hallberg (Social Democratic Party)
Minister for Foreign Trade and Nordic Affairs

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