



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Culture

# Opinion piece by Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister and Alice Bah Kuhnke, Minister for Culture and Democracy

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Opinion piece in Svenska Dagbladet on International Holocaust Remembrance Day by Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister (S) and Alice Bah Kuhnke, Minister for Culture and Democracy (MP)

Hédi Fried, author and Auschwitz survivor, wrote: "Can anyone say when something begins? Grains of sand are added to grains of sand, and before you know it there is a pile of sand in front of you."

Today is International Holocaust Remembrance Day, when we remember one of humanity's greatest crimes against itself. But knowing the terrible things that humanity is capable of compels us to do more than just remember. Racism, anti-Semitism, antiziganism, hate against LGBTQ people and prejudice against people with disabilities are still an ongoing scourge. This misanthropy limits freedom for the individual and cohesion among us all. It finds expression in everything from physical violence on our streets, to threats and conspiracy theories on social media.

It also exists in Swedish politics. There are members of the Swedish Riksdag who openly question whether Jews can be regarded as Swedish. Proposals, motivated by anti-Semitic notions, have been submitted to limit the freedom of the media. On an almost daily basis, political actors are exposed for spreading racist ideas, openly or in secret. Grains of sand are added to grains of sand.

The principle of the equal value of all people must never be compromised. Democratic values in Sweden must be defended, deepened and strengthened for the future. The Government is therefore implementing a national plan to combat racism, as well as similar forms of hostility and hate crime. The Living History Forum is rolling out an extensive educational initiative to reach Swedish schools and professional groups, such as employment agents, social workers and police employees. The Swedish Research Council has begun a survey of racism in the Swedish labour market. The Research Bill outlines major investments in research involving racism and xenophobia, and faith communities are receiving increased support for interfaith dialogues around the country.

At the same time, more work is required to strengthen security for vulnerable groups and people. Everyone must be able display their religious affiliation or identity openly and proudly in public. This is the duty of democratic society. Religious communities will therefore receive extra funds for security-enhancing measures to strengthen security around religious and cultural activities. The Swedish Police Authority has also been tasked with strengthening efforts against hate crime, and now has the capacity to investigate and combat hate crime in all regions of Sweden, with special hate crime groups in the three metropolitan regions.

This work must never stop. Therefore, we are today presenting three further measures:

1. Greater security at schools. School must be a secure place for all pupils and staff, regardless of religious affiliation. Children should never have to worry about hate crime or intolerance at their school. The Government will therefore further support security at schools identified as having a threat situation.
2. More effective measures against anti-Semitic hate crime. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention is being tasked with conducting an in-depth study of anti-Semitic hate crime. Using this as a base, efforts against anti-Semitic hate crime will be strengthened and made more effective.
3. New international forum. Two decades will soon have passed since the major Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust which, in the Stockholm Declaration, set out the basis for international cooperation on remembering the Holocaust. Never forgetting means always reminding ourselves. The Government therefore intends to host a second international forum in 2020, 20 years after the first, to honour the victims, follow up the work and, together with other countries and

organisations, continue to develop the initiatives to prevent new crimes against humanity.

Finally, we want to underline that your efforts are also needed. Never tolerate hate or threats, regardless of who is targeted, question conspiracy theories and false rumours, seek understanding where others try to spread contempt. The defence of democracy is a responsibility shared by all democratic citizens.

Those of us who live in Sweden must be able to feel secure and free, regardless of which culture we are part of, which god we believe in, or who we love. We must therefore see every grain of hate and intolerance in Sweden, and prevent them from ever gaining a foothold. Today, and every day, those of us who defend democracy have a duty to remember the Holocaust and through our actions say: "Never again."

Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister (S)

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Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of Culture

# Pioneering Freedom

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The Huffington Post, 2 December 2016. Opinion piece by Ms Alice Bah Khunke, Minister for Culture and Democracy and Ms Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General.

250 years ago the world witnessed the passage of the first Freedom of the Press Act, enacted by the Swedish Parliament, covering modern-day Sweden and Finland. This was the first act to constitutionally protect press freedom, almost two centuries before the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since then, some 120 countries have followed this example and enacted similar legislation - ensuring the public's right to know, empowering journalists and bolstering freedoms across the board.

Today, more than ever, we must renew this pioneering spirit.

Freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of information are ends in themselves — the free flow of ideas and opinions, as well as debate and critical examination, creates a wealth of ideas and drives innovation and positive change. They are vital for accountability and transparency. They are pillars of democracy, the rule of law and good governance. They are foundations for more inclusive and sustainable development, and, in empowering every woman and man, they are also forces for intercultural dialogue and peace.

For this, we need wider access to information and enabling media environments. Media pluralism is essential for all voices to be heard, to allow all to participate in sharing the diversity of cultural expressions, opinions, stories and information. This is an engine for widening opportunities to overcome inequalities, while strengthening the foundations of democratic institutions. And these rights must stand both offline and online - the digital revolution must also be a rights revolution.

Safety for journalists is essential, as key users of the right to information, enhancing accountability on behalf of the public and promoting a culture of openness and transparency in Government and across all sectors.

The stakes are high. Over the last ten years, 827 journalists have been killed in the line of duty. In 2014-2015, 59 percent of them were working in countries affected by conflict - and almost 90 percent of them were local journalists. These killings are but the tip of the iceberg of arbitrary detention, intimidation and harassment, where female journalists are particularly targeted.

These figures, from UNESCO's most recent report on the safety of journalists, highlight the tragic risks facing journalists. The situation is made worse by impunity. In nine out of ten cases, those responsible for killing journalists are never punished. This creates a vicious circle that poisons all society.

This cannot stand. In 2015, all countries agreed on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - this includes a target "to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements."

Everyone has a role to play in taking this forward. Governments must pursue swift investigations into crimes against journalists and bolster freedom of information legislation. Judicial systems and security services should be trained on freedom of expression. National monitoring and protection mechanisms should be considered. Media organizations must ensure international and local staff have the right training and resources, to enhance their safety. We need every voice to be heard - especially those of women, who remain under-represented in news-making, decision-making, and media ownership. Journalism education must be strengthened, because the highest professional standards of journalism are essential for the news media industry to be seen as representative and credible.

Working with Sweden, UNESCO is spearheading these goals across the world, starting in crisis situations and countries in transition. This is the importance of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which UNESCO is leading for the safety of journalists. We are championing the fight against impunity by raising the red flag every time a journalist is killed and calling for justice. Every year, September 28 marks the International Day for Universal Access to Information. The 250th anniversary of the Freedom of the Press Act in

Sweden reminds us of the long road we have travelled to promote freedom of expression. Inspired by Sweden, we need every country to introduce access to information legislation.

Dag Hammarskjöld once said that "freedom from fear could be said to sum up the whole philosophy of human rights." Today, more than ever, we must stand up to fear, to allow everyone to seek information and speak out. This is a basic human right - it is a fundamental freedom that strengthens all society.



Government Offices of Sweden

Opinion piece from Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice

# Strengthen the right of LGBTQ people to be themselves

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Opinion article, Newspaper Expressen, 8 february 2016  
Legislation must keep pace with developments in society. The Government therefore plans to implement changes that aim to offer the same conditions for everyone, regardless of their choice of partner and type of family, write five government ministers.

People have the right to be themselves in all areas of life. This includes the right to live with the person you love and to have your family formation treated with respect. Efforts to break old norms that limit people from fully living their lives must continue. This applies particularly to policies for the rights of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ people).

Proactive organisations in civil society and courageous politicians before us have helped to move the situation of LGBTQ issues in the right direction. Society is constantly evolving, and perceptions of parenthood, family, gender and the rights of the child in the family evolve with it. Today, there are numerous family constellations other than the traditional nuclear families: single, friends with children, step-families or families with several mothers or fathers. Our social systems must also meet the needs of these families.

Legislation and its application must keep pace with developments in society. It must accommodate various ways of forming a family and ensure the right of all people to good health. The Government is therefore planning to implement changes that aim to offer the same conditions for everyone, regardless of the choice of partner and type of family that each of us chooses

to live with:

- Parental support and family law issues in social services need to be more modern, equitable and gender equal. Family constellations vary and have different needs. In light of this, the Government has concentrated responsibility for these issues at the Family Law and Parental Support Authority. An important task for the Authority is producing knowledge support for relevant actors so that these, in turn, can provide better support and guidance to parents and children.
- Families can take many different forms, but when the parental insurance system was designed, it was still based on the idea of a nuclear family with two co-habiting parents. The living conditions of families with children have changed over time.

More than one in five children grows up in a family constellation other than one including both their biological parents. The inquiry on parental insurance that is now to be conducted has therefore been tasked with identifying problems and investigating possibilities for facilitating the use of parental insurance by different family constellations.

- There are currently large health disparities between different groups in society. To close the avoidable health gaps within a generation, the Government has appointed a commission for equitable health. We know that LGBTQ people in general have poorer health and young LGBTQ people are particularly vulnerable with regard to mental health. In its work, the commission will therefore take into account health disparities between LGBTQ people and the rest of the population.
- The treatment of LGBTQ people in health and medical care is unequal across the country. Unfortunately, in their contacts with different authorities, individuals are sometimes doubted and treated ignorantly. This leads to LGBTQ people in some cases refraining from seeking care.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has been tasked with analysing care and treatment of intersex people (persons whose gender cannot be determined due to biological reasons) and implementing measures in the various areas of activity of social services. The objective is to raise awareness of LGBTQ people's living conditions and the various forms discrimination can take. The National Board of Health and Welfare and the Public Health Agency of Sweden will also review how issues concerning the health of young transgender people could be highlighted within the

framework of other mental health initiatives.

- There have been several high-profile cases where information was registered in the population registration regarding a person who had changed gender in such a way that the link between individuals, such as a child and a parent, was lost. The Swedish Tax Agency has now been tasked with describing what has been done or will be done to prevent problems that may arise.
- Current regulations regarding paternity and parenthood are based on heterosexual marriage. There is reason to review whether the regulations should be updated and for this reason, the Government intends to appoint an inquiry in the spring to conduct a review of the legislation.

These are some of the initiatives the Government is now implementing. We know there is a lot left to do. Discrimination, inequitable treatment and violence are still part of daily life for many LGBTQ people all around the country. This is never acceptable. The Government will continue its efforts to strengthen the possibility for LGBTQ people to fully be themselves in all areas of life.

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Åsa Regnér  
Minister for Children, the Elderly and Gender Equality

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Opinion piece from Ministry of Culture

# Strengthening our efforts to combat violent extremism

Published 09 January 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Dagens Nyheter 9 januari 2015 An attack has taken place. Creating conflict is the modus operandi of extremism, both in Sweden and in France. It is especially serious when this violence targets freedom of speech. We are now intensifying our efforts to map threats posed by violent extremism, and to take preventive action against such extremism, writes Minister for Culture and Democracy Alice Bah Kuhnke (Green Party).

A great deal has already been said and written about Wednesday's appalling terrorist attack on the French magazine Charlie Hebdo. Some people feel that condemnation and demonstrations are meaningless displays that do not have an impact on those who despise democracy so much they would attack it.

However, our collective display of abhorrence and rejection shows the power of democracy. We do this by collectively showing that terror and violence is never a solution or a way forward. By coming together, we demonstrate that our society has not given in to terror.

Fear is both the terrorist's aim and method. Not just today, but also in the long term. The attack against the editorial office in Paris was not just meant to spread death here and now. The attackers also wanted to send a threatening message to all future journalistic activities. The goal is to create unease that subtly creeps up on journalists, the press and ultimately freedom of speech.

In our part of Europe, we have had our fair share of attacks against democracy. The attacks in recent years against mosques and synagogues in Sweden are one example. The attacks by Nazis against the demonstration in Kärntorp is another. Journalists who are threatened by both right-wing and left wing extremists due the subjects they cover and report on is yet another. What all these attacks have in common is that they try to scare people into silence and refrain from democratic involvement.

As a group, journalists are particularly exposed to threats, harassment and violence, in some instances with fatal consequences. According to the International Federation of Journalists, 118 journalists were murdered last year. One of these was Swedish journalist Nils Horner. According to Reporters Without Borders, violence against journalists has also become more systematic, brutal and raw than before.

At the same time we see how extremism and polarisation is growing stronger in the EU. In many areas – including Sweden – xenophobic parties are taking seats in parliament and other elected assemblies. In many countries, these parties have also succeeded in shifting the political debate so that serious restrictions on the free movement of people in the EU have been introduced, as have even higher walls against those fleeing from war and terror. In Sweden, however, we can boast a broad consensus in the Riksdag that has closed that path – something we can all take pride in, regardless of party affiliation.

If we are to continue to be an open, tolerant and proud country, we need to strengthen society's security system against the destructive force of terrorism. The solution is more and stronger democracy, both in Sweden and in the EU. France is not alone in this – joint efforts are needed to defend continued democracy in Europe.

In his Statement of Government Policy, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven stated that it is through the engagement of many people that we can prevent anti-democratic ideas from gaining a foothold in our country.

The Government will regularly propose concrete proposals of measures to help strengthen the democratic process and prevent more people falling into in situations where extremism can take root and grow.

The Government has presented a number of measures for the year ahead:  
- The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention has been instructed to survey and analyse existing knowledge about threats, violence and harassment against individuals with duties or positions of particular importance to democratic society. Those covered by the survey are active

journalists, elected politicians and officials, and people active in the judicial system and other relevant public authorities. We hope that the data from the Council will provide us with an adequate picture so that we can propose concrete countermeasures at local and national level. The Council will present its findings in March 2015.

- High priority is given both to efforts against recruitment to extremist environments and support to those working to help people leave these environments. In 2015, SEK 5 million will be invested in measures against violent extremism by organisations and municipalities. This work deals with both countering recruitment and providing help to those who wish to leave the extremist environment.

- Extensive preventive efforts against violent extremism will be coordinated by the Government's special coordinator, Mona Sahlin. For example, in 2015 the Government plans to introduce an action plan on preventing people from taking part in foreign fighting.

- During the year, the Government will prepare a national strategy against Islamophobia. Intensified information campaigns will help us strengthen society's common resilience against distrust and fear.

The role of a free press in democracy must not be underestimated or taken for granted. An independent and free press ensures a strong democracy, in which power is both examined and discussed. Freedom of expression also includes the right to publish social satire targeting all kinds of figures of authority, both religious and political.

There are no simple solutions to difficult problems. This means that we cannot rely on simple populist proposals for solutions. In the same way that more lock and alarm systems do not solve society's problems with criminality, we must not believe that a repressive policy which limits democracy will be able to prevent future terrorist attacks.

The basis for our being able to seriously drive off extremism and violence is a society with reduced social gaps, more jobs and increased participation.

Creating conflict is the modus operandi of extremism. Democracy's response must be to create scope for a variety of voices and opinions.

Alice Bah Kuhnke, Minister for Culture and Democracy