



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the ALMA Award ceremony 2018

Published 29 May 2018

Stockholm, 29 May 2017. Check against delivery.

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Jaqueline Woodson,

Daring to stand firm when everything around us is changing is difficult. Being true to our convictions – to who we are – when everyone around us seems to expect something different, requires all our courage. This is something that many of us are struggling with right now. Myself included. To find the strength and to dare, we need good role models. Someone who leads the way and shows that it is possible.

Astrid Lindgren is one of my role models. I sometimes ask myself what she would say, if she could see what Sweden and the world is like today. A world where so many of the values she held high are threatened: the wonder of nature, the beauty of the seasons, the equal worth of all people, and the right to live in peace and freedom.

I ask myself this, even though I know the answer. Because over the last few years, through her diaries and letters that have been published, we have been able to learn more about the profound reflections, the razor-sharp skill of the writer, and the human maturity that lie behind one of the world's most prominent bodies of work of all time. She is, and will remain, a role model – when we doubt and when we despair.

Jaqueline Woodson,

It is a very special pleasure for me to be with you today. This is actually the second time in just a few weeks. The first was in New York, where we met and were able to sit and talk. The little foretaste I've had of your work

already means a great deal to me.

Just like Astrid Lindgren, you stand firm. You don't abandon your readers – you stay by their side. Not by answering their questions, but by showing them – through your stories – how different life can be. And that it's ok. Your message is: “You exist. Your thoughts and feelings are real – and that's ok.”

If we can impart this feeling to our children and to young people, I am sure that more will dare to look beyond self-criticism, stifle their fear of being left out, and have confidence in their convictions. Then we will dare to defend what is essential in our lives: freedom and the right to be who we are.

Today is your day, Jaqueline. You have been awarded the most distinguished prize a writer of children's and young adult literature can receive. On behalf of the Swedish Government, I offer you our warmest congratulations and look forward to following your work in the future.

Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Opening Address by Minister for Culture and Democracy Alice Bah Kuhnke at the Dag Hammarskjöld and the United Nations Seminar on 16 May

Published 18 May 2018

Berlin, 16 May 2018. Check against delivery.

Excellencies, Ambassadors, dear Friends,

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege to address the UN Security Council – in a speech about the need to prevent sexual violence in conflict. I am now on a tour in Europe – by train! Yesterday I visited the Militärhistorisches Museum in Dresden, and was guided through the exhibition Gewalt und Geschlecht, violence and gender, a brave exhibition about us, and what we as human beings do to each other.

Before the visit to the museum I had a meeting with the First Deputy Mayor of Dresden. We talked about the challenges we face in Dresden and Germany as well in as in cities like Stockholm, Ludvika and in other parts of Sweden. The fact that polarization, and lack in trust and distrust among the many, cast shadows over our democracies and are or at least should be on top of all leaders' agendas.

We are here today to discuss and learn from each other's experiences. This seminar offers an excellent opportunity to advance international peace and security.

In 1954, former Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, stated that "the United Nations was not created to bring us to heaven, but to save us from

hell". Since Sweden became a member of the UN, active participation has been a natural part of Swedish foreign policy.

The organization has, with combined efforts by its Member States, helped to prevent catastrophic wars that preceded its founding. Extreme poverty has fallen to an historic low. Life expectancy continues to climb. Millions of people are reached every year with life-saving humanitarian assistance.

The United Nations is a central arena for Sweden's efforts to combat global challenges. Sweden contributes substantial resources to the UN but our commitment does not stop there.

We also want to contribute to reforms. We want to help to make the UN more effective, transparent and fit-for-purpose. We want the UN to do more, to be better and more pertinent to the important fight for peace world-wide. A better, more relevant UN will earn its trust from the public and the organization can rise to the global and pressing challenges that we as a society face today.

That's why we contribute to the UN and why strong support for the UN must continue.

I am happy and proud that the Swedish Embassy and the United Nations Association of Germany here in Berlin join forces on this interesting topic today.

Since Sweden chairs the Nordic Council of Ministers this year, and we are right now in a Nordic space, I would also like to say a few words on the need for strong Nordic cooperation, at home and internationally – not least at the UN. I know that the Nordic countries share many priorities at the UN, such as human rights, disarmament, climate change and gender equality. Together we can work for a stronger UN.

I know that the Nordic countries will continue to be voices of integrity and solidarity – in the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld, who unfortunately lost his life while serving us, the United Nations.

I am also glad that the Dag Hammarskjöld Collection - his archives with letters and documents - is since 2017, included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Collection was donated to Kungliga Biblioteket -The National Library of Sweden - in accordance with his will. The Collection

documents the work and influence of Hammarskjöld and shows the Government official as well as the private person. It covers a significant period of UN history and is of great importance for the understanding of the post second World War history and the Cold War. I am proud that the Collection now has the status as a Memory of the World and that it is available and free to read - for everybody.

Dag Hammarskjöld once said that: "Only they who keep their eyes fixed on the far horizon, will find the right road."

To that I would like to add that if we know where we are coming from, we know where we are and - we know where we are going!

Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the 17th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Published 17 April 2018

Agenda item 4: Implementation of the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum with reference to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Monday April 16th 2018 Nordic statement Delivered by: Alice Bah Kuhnke, Minister for Culture and Democracy of Sweden Check against delivery.

Thank you Chairperson,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark together with Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country Sweden.

What does it mean to be forced to forsake your heritage, to be forced to speak another language than your own? Indigenous peoples all over the world has been exposed to racism as well as human rights violations and abuses through history and to this day. As state representatives we must listen, engage and act to pave the way for a better future.

For us, the Nordic countries, promoting and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples remain longstanding priorities. We are committed to do our part to ensure the realization of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – a milestone in recognizing the status and rights of indigenous peoples.

As the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has pointed out on several occasions: establishment of formalized procedures that give indigenous peoples the opportunity to participate and the ability to genuinely influence decision-making in issues that concern them is crucial.

At the UN, efforts to enhance Indigenous Peoples' participation are a concrete way to make their voices meaningfully heard. The Swedish government is currently drafting a proposal for a more comprehensive procedure for consultations between public authorities and the Sami people.

One measure to implement the declaration has been taken by Norway, Finland and Sweden in the negotiations of a Nordic Sami Convention. The proposed convention is under consideration at the Sami Parliaments in our respective countries and we hope for a positive outcome.

In Denmark, the Act of Greenland self-Government has facilitated the transfer of a long range of competences and responsibilities to the Self-Government and ensures consultation procedures regarding regulation relevant to Greenland. The Act furthermore describes Greenland's access to independence, stipulating that if the people of Greenland takes a decision in favor of independence, negotiations are to commence between the Danish Government and Naalakkersuisut regarding the introduction of independence for Greenland.

Human rights defenders, particularly those working to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, are increasingly under attack around the world. According to the organization Front Line Defenders, more than 300 human rights defenders were murdered in 2017. A majority of them were engaged in the defense of land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights. At the same time, the levels of impunity remain alarmingly and unacceptably high.

Attacks on human rights defenders must come to an end. A clear message on this was sent in December last year when the General Assembly by consensus adopted a Norwegian-led resolution reaffirming the importance of the work done by human rights defenders.

As many others, we have noted with great concern reports on the current situation for the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We reiterate our strong support for this mandate as well as the other special procedures mandate holders under the authority of the UN Human Rights Council. We would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for her consistent engagement to strengthen the promotion and protection of the rights of

indigenous peoples.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the Multi-Stakeholder Consultation on Strengthening the Implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity

Published 30 June 2017

Geneva, 29 June 2017. Check against delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished colleagues,

I am truly honoured and proud to be here. I thank UNESCO and the High Commissioner for Human Rights for organising this key initiative and for the invitation. I am also hopeful to see such a broad representation at this meeting, since this is an issue we need to address in broad alliances. My name is Alice Bah Kuhnke and I'm the minister of Culture and Democracy in Sweden, which includes responsibility for media policy, but also to safeguard our human rights.

Freedom of expression is the foundation of every free nation. It makes sure that critical voices can be heard, that our ongoing conversation includes different perspectives, that what we take as a given can be questioned. Freedom of expression is a basic human right, but it is also a fundamental part of a democratic society. This needs to be repeated.

I believe that the democratic and open society is at risk. Not long ago, freedom of expression and democratic values were being strengthened in many countries where they previously had been limited. The path towards

more freedom appeared ever brighter.

But over the last few years we have seen the opposite development in many parts of the world. In the name of countering terrorism, freedom is set aside and prejudice takes its place.

I believe in the rule of law, of safeguarding our freedoms and our human rights, because these are the values that we are defending from terrorists. We as democratic societies should resist, and fight back, not do them a favour.

There are also other obstacles to free speech. As you well know, the 2017 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters without Borders shows an increase in the number of countries where the media freedom situation is very grave and highlights the scale and variety of the obstacles to media freedom throughout the world.

In all, the situation has worsened in nearly two thirds of the 180 countries in the Index.

According to the same index, my country Sweden has climbed to second place. And yes, it is true that we have freedom of speech and free press in Sweden. However, we are also witnessing problems. We are experiencing a harsher debate climate. Journalists, artists, elected officials and authors are threatened and attacked for their works and their opinions. Women journalists are more targeted than others, often simply for being women. The situation has a chilling effect on the possibilities to express opinions, on the public watchdog role of journalists and on public debate in general.

The Swedish government is a feminist government, the first one in the world! Bringing the situation of women journalist to the top of the international agenda is one of my priorities. We need to show greater determination in our attention to women journalists and women media workers. In Sweden and around the world, women face specific forms of threats including sexual harassment and gender-based violence, both online and offline, with deep impact in terms of self-censorship and the ability of these women to carry out their chosen profession.

Journalists and the press are targeted by those who feel threatened by freedom of expression and transparency. Threats against journalists lead to self-censorship which poses a major threat to democracy. In order for the media to be able to fulfil its' corner stone role in a democracy, journalists, media workers, bloggers, media organizations and individuals must be able to

discuss and debate issues freely and safely.

Internet and social media platforms are empowering citizens to fully use their right to freedom of expression and access to information to disseminate opinions, information and news. And we have to bridge the digital divide and realise women's rights online. New technology is an enabler of democratic development, but this means we have to tackle its negative aspects such as disinformation, propaganda and a harsher debate climate.

Some weeks from now, I will present a national action plan to protect journalists, media workers, artists and elected officials, who use freedom of expression as their most important tool. This plan will present a number of actions by the Government to tackle the negative development we have seen in Sweden over the last few years, to ensure a continued democratic debate.

Sweden works closely with UNESCO on how to develop and strengthen the UN work to improve the safety of journalists and fight impunity worldwide. In this regard, I would like to highlight the UNESCO' report on "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development". As you well know, it is the only UN report that covers these issues in a long term perspective. This becomes even more relevant in the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda. We look forward to the third World Trends report being launched in November.

Cooperating with UNESCO has also benefitted our domestic work and the Swedish Government encourages other states to do the same. It would give power to the movement if more governments were to adopt national plans for comprehensive action. Sweden encourages others to join this exercise and will be happy to share our experiences.

Dear colleagues, distinguished participants,

At the core of our deliberations today is the need to strengthen our efforts to address the urgent situation that journalists are facing all over the world. It is unacceptable that – still in our days - human rights and fundamental rights continue to be violated and met with impunity in several countries. It is unacceptable that journalists and media workers are being kidnapped, tortured and killed – and the perpetrators are not held accountable.

Women media workers are facing a double vulnerability and are frequently victims of intimidation, threats and violence. We cannot accept impunity for

these crimes that in addition to the tragedy in itself also threatens to weaken our society by curbing peoples' right to freedom of expression and information.

The role of the state is to guarantee and further these rights, not to hamper them or diminish them. Those of us who truly believe in these values have no time to rest; we have to get up on our feet and help others to get up.

We need to constantly remind ourselves what is at stake. The values that once were so crucial in shaping our societies – freedom, human rights, equality and science. I cannot think of anything more important to fight for, than that. So let us fight together!

Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the ALMA Award ceremony 2017

Published 31 May 2017

Stockholm, 29 May 2017. Check against delivery.

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr Erlbruch,

Everyone who has children close to them or works with children knows that they have to try and keep up with them.

Hunger and thirst, tiredness and excess energy. As an adult, you have to be there with a helping hand, a slice of bread, a glass of water. Stroke their back to settle them.

You also have to be prepared for the deepest existential questions.

Lingonberry jam or tomato ketchup on meatballs leads to a discussion about why people actually like different things. Tying shoelaces leads to a discussion about why most people have two legs but some of us don't. Why and how? And why do we even exist? I often think with gratitude of all the teaching staff who work with our children and young people. Who, while cutting apples into slices, are asked questions that philosophers have devoted thousands of years to finding answers to, or who quickly have to change the plans for a maths lesson because a question has come up that cannot be set aside.

In my work as Minister for Culture, one of the most important issues is ensuring that these teachers and children have books, libraries and, not least, librarians close at hand. We all know that books are a fantastic source of knowledge, but also that literature can help us get to grips with concepts. Books are there when we adults do not have the energy, do not have any answers, or perhaps do not dare to answer. Every child must have the opportunity to find their way to books, and librarians are invaluable in this

regard. Mr Erlbruch – you dare to write and draw! You are brave in many ways, and in this respect your writing is reminiscent of Astrid Lindgren's. Your work reflects what children's lives are like – they contain the light-hearted and the deeply existential, side by side. We are in awe of the incomprehensible, we find happiness in small pleasures and we become angry over injustices.

In one of your books – *Duck, Death and the Tulip* – you speak to the reader about that thing called death, which follows us everywhere, however hard we try to push it away. That thing called death – which we adults often find so difficult to talk about especially to children. Without offering any answers, you tell it like it is: even when we are no longer alive, the lake is still there.

Everything is the same, but completely different, because we are not there. We feel deep sadness when thinking about this. But you, Mr Erlbruch, have managed with your story to give every individual a feeling of immeasurable importance. Being able to do this without hiding the truth is nothing but great art. I hope and believe that more and more people will read your book when questions about sadness, longing and our very existence need to be discussed.

Today, Mr Erlbruch, I would like to congratulate you on receiving this important prize, and to thank you on behalf of children and adults alike.

Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at Stockholm Internet Forum

Published 31 May 2017

Stockholm, 17 May 2017. Check against delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues!

I am very honoured and proud to be here this morning. I thank Lennart Båge and Sida for the invitation and the possibility to address this truly international Forum. A warm welcome to Sweden and to Stockholm!

Freedom. It is the best word I know. It is what guides me in my work as a politician and Minister for Culture and Democracy in the Swedish Government. Freedom for the media, the free and independent arts, the freedom of individuals to become who they want to be without discrimination. Freedom of speech, even when it hurts. Countering arguments of populists with the arguments of a free society where we all can access information, build our own opinion, where we all can live freely.

Not long ago, many of us felt that freedom of expression and democratic values were being strengthened in many countries where this previously had been limited. The path towards more freedom appeared to be guaranteed. But over the last few years we have seen the opposite development in many parts of the world. This is true not at least for Europe and its neighbouring countries, where we certainly did not expect this to happen. Where we promised each other that this would not happen, again. The development is deeply worrying.

We are guaranteeing the freedom of speech and the free press in Sweden. Not all politicians in the Swedish Parliament agree on this, but the majority still stand strong. However, we are witnessing more problems. We are experiencing a harsher debate climate and increasing threats in the Swedish debate.

Journalists, artists, elected officials and authors are threatened and attacked for their works and their opinions. Today more than before. It is unacceptable, not only because of the personal consequences, but they may also have a chilling effect on the freedom of expression, on the public watchdog role of journalists and on public debate in general. It is a critical challenge for us, to safeguard the democratic and open society, which I believe is at risk.

The media has, as we all know, a vital role to play in promoting transparency and accountability. Whether it is scrutiny of the performance of the government, revealing corruption or reporting on crimes, the media has to be able to do its' work in an open way. Threats on journalists can lead to self-censorship and that it is a major threat to democracy which is high on my government's agenda.

The media must be able to operate in an environment free of fear. Journalists must be able to investigate important issues and express informed opinion without fear of prosecution. In order for the media to be able to fulfill its' corner stone role in a democracy, journalists, bloggers, media organizations and individuals must be allowed to discuss and debate issues freely and safely.

In this context we also urgently need to join forces and step up against the specific challenges faced by female journalists. It is alarming that female journalists are increasingly being abused online. The Swedish government is a "feminist government", the world's first officially feminist government. Later today, you will hear from my dear colleague, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ms Margot Wallström, addressing what Sweden does globally as a feminist government. Bringing the situation of female journalist to the top of relevant international as well as national agendas is one of our priorities.

Sweden works closely with Unesco on how to develop and strengthen the UN's work with a view to improve the safety of journalists worldwide and on the issue of impunity. I wish to take this opportunity to highlight Unesco's never-ending efforts and tireless work on these very important issues of mutual concern.

The media landscape is changing rapidly, creating both opportunities and challenges for freedom of expression and media freedom. In many countries the media is shifting – or has already shifted – from traditional newspapers and TV to digital distribution channels. Social media is playing a big part in this fast-growing revolution, often being the main arena for communication

and public debate.

Internet and social media platforms are empowering citizens to fully use their right to freedom of expression and access to information to disseminate opinions, information and news. New technology is an enabler of democratic development. But we have also seen how technology can be used to spread disinformation and act as channels of hate and threats.

Disinformation risk undermining trust in established media and institutions, and promoting the spread of online echo chambers, where conspiracy theories and half-truths become the perceived truth. But how come this has not been addressed or reported is a question that then will be asked?

Disinformation erodes citizens' trust in institutions on which democratic societies are built. That is why, now more than ever, tools and learning about critical thinking and source criticism must be on the political "to do-list".

Dear colleagues, distinguished participants, The goal for me as minister for culture and democracy is to safeguard the democratic right to information, in a way that complies with the needs of the person. This is a matter of democracy, a matter of human rights and also of course a matter of access to culture. In the world that we share today all countries need to return to the core values of humanism, democracy and inclusion as expressed in the fundamental human rights. In this work access to information, the right to free speech, the right to express oneself without censorship or threats of violence is truly fundamental. It cannot be underlined enough.

The role of the state must be to guarantee and further these rights, not to hamper them or diminish them. Those of us who truly believe in these values have no time to rest; we have to get up on our feet. Our voices are needed; let's make the best use of them.

Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the announcement of the 2017 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award laureate

Published 05 April 2017

Stockholm, 4 April 2017. Check against delivery.

Friends – both here and in Bologna,

Children must be allowed to be children. This very much goes without saying. We adults have to meet children where they are, not the other way round. And this sounds easy.

But what does it really mean to meet children where they are? How do we know what they can and cannot manage? It feels natural to want to protect children from the difficult things in life. We want them to be surrounded, for as long as possible, by all that is beautiful and kind, to fill them with goodness.

Few advocates for the best interests of children can match Astrid Lindgren, who we are remembering here today. In her books we dive into idyllic environments and we get a sense of an ever-present warm embrace. But she also writes about death, loneliness and grief.

Astrid Lindgren said that "Death and love are the big things that people experience; they interest people of all ages. We mustn't scare children so much that they get into a state of anxiety, but they need to be roused by art as much as adults do."

Seldom has the power of art felt as relevant as it does right now. We are living in uncertain times and the consequences of what is happening in both

global politics and our own country are difficult to foresee. It is not at all easy being adult and explaining things to our children, let alone reassuring them. We can hardly reassure ourselves.

A lot of the children's and young people's literature that is written today offers exactly what Astrid Lindgren talked about: it evokes feelings and thoughts, it changes perspectives. It shows us that the answers are not in the simple solutions. That anger can inspire action that makes the world a better place. That tears are not just an expression of grief but also of the ability to feel empathy. Literature can instil courage and strength so that each and every one of us dares to make a difference.

This is the literature we are celebrating here today. Literature in the spirit of Astrid Lindgren that provides inspiration and courage to live life to the fullest, assert yourself and also take responsibility.

Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the inauguration of the Göteborg Film Festival 2017

Published 30 January 2017 Updated 30 January 2017

Göteborg, 27 January 2017. Check against delivery.

Friends and film-lovers,

Being here with you tonight marks for me the end of a very intensive and emotional couple of days in Gothenburg. Today, 27 January, is Holocaust Remembrance Day, marking the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp exactly 72 years ago.

And it is at moments like these that I think with enormous gratitude about culture. And about film, which reflects people's fates so well; tells stories that have not yet been told; documents and compiles. The story of us, of what came before and what is to come.

Racism and nationalism are tightening their grip in Europe and the world at the moment. Authoritarian leaders are stepping forward and presenting simple solutions to complex problems. Fundamental conditions for a democracy, such as respect for facts, freedom of the press and the equal value of all people, are flagrantly ignored. This is happening in countries that until very recently felt very close to ours.

But this trend is a complex one, and alongside the very worrying path some countries have chosen there is a greater openness and commitment to the equal value of all people. And the variety of films the Gothenburg Film Festival is presenting over the coming days really shows this. I have read the festival programme and I can see how it captures our time. Social exclusion, belonging on one's own terms, religion and vulnerability are portrayed from various starting points.

The choice of 'religion' as the festival theme is both brave and perfectly natural. And it was high time for Sápmi to receive attention as a film region in a coherent way.

Artistic director Jonas Holmberg will discuss the possible midlife crisis the festival may be experiencing as it turns 40. In my view, if there has been a crisis, the festival has got through it. This festival shows the maturity one likes to see in a 40-year-old – not anxious, but forward-looking; with a certain authority but firmly rooted in the present. Celebrating the festival's 40th birthday by showing the opening film simultaneously at 40 cinemas for SEK 40 per ticket is very much in line with this, and very elegant!

This is a new year and a new film policy has taken effect. As Minister for Culture and Democracy, I have great expectations for what it will lead to. Of course, many challenges remain and there are no simple solutions to the challenges facing the Swedish film industry. We are many that are convinced that a change was necessary and I am also being met with an enthusiasm for the new policy, as well as a satisfaction that the fundamental aspects of film policy have been discussed.

The film festivals have always been key actors for spreading a broad range of films – and this is something you are demonstrating very clearly today.

As we all know, 84 countries are represented by the 457 films being shown this week. It is great to see film-makers, audiences, artists, politicians and debaters meeting and discussing different issues, experiences and with the Gothenburg Film Festival as the backdrop. This enriches cultural expression in Swedish film. And it enriches our entire country.

With these words I would like to wish you the best of luck and declare the 2017 Gothenburg Film Festival open.

Thank you.



Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the AIPCE Conference

Published 11 October 2016 Updated 11 October 2016

Stockholm, 6 October 2016. Check against delivery.

Free and independent media is a foundation of democracy and rule of law. Every day we have to protect the role of journalists in preserving democracy and defending freedom of expression. In order to be a democratic society we absolutely have to safeguard free speech and freedom of the press.

This year, we're celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Swedish Freedom of the Press Act. It is a long tradition to be very proud of, but the freedom of the press cannot be taken for granted.

Free media needs protection and support from the government, but most of all they need freedom from the government. The big question for me, and for the Swedish government, is how to best strengthen journalism and media, especially in times of economic restraints, convergence and when local media is having difficulties, without interfering with the freedom of the media. The content of media should never be scrutinized by the state.

The Swedish Press Council now celebrates 100 years. It is the oldest tribunal of its kind in the world. This self-disciplinary system is not based on legislation. It is entirely voluntary and wholly financed by four press organizations. It's a system that has been serving the Swedish press well for a hundred years, and a good example of how media can handle ethical questions entirely without interference from politicians.

The confidence in the journalistic profession and the trust from the public are key factors. For the citizens, access to objective information about the world is a key factor in making conscious decisions and forming an opinion on complex matters. The role of the journalist and journalism is becoming more and more important.

The development during these last few years is really worrying. I am talking about the serious problems we see here at home where threats and even sometimes acts of violence against journalists have increased. Research shows, as you may know, that one third of all journalists in Sweden report having been threatened over the last twelve months. For many of them, it has become part of everyday life, and has in some way affected decisions taken concerning their work. This is totally unacceptable. The threats may lead to self-censorship which in itself is a major threat to democracy.

Right now there are several initiatives here in Sweden to counteract threats and violence against journalists and artists. The Swedish association of journalists, the Swedish publishers (Utgivarna), the Swedish Writers' Union and the Swedish PEN, to mention some, are doing an important work in this field.

The Swedish government and my ministry are currently working on an action plan to prevent threats and violence against artists, politicians and journalists. My goal is to have this action plan, which will be systematic, in place next year. I have met with representatives from the Swedish media sector during this year to discuss these matters.

But the problems occur not only here in Sweden, there are also grave threats globally. We don't have to travel far to find places where the freedom of speech is limited. A few years ago it would have been considered outrageous, but now it is commonplace. From all over the world we get reports of impunity, silencing and even murders of journalists. I find these trends extremely worrying. The fight against threats directed at journalists, authors and artists has to be fought every day.

The topic that will be discussed is about if the freedom of the press is under pressure in Europe.

We have had an extremely important debate and discussion in Europe and the EU the last few years about independence of media and press and freedom of expression. This discussion has been fuelled by sudden and worrying changes in media legislation and the treatment of public service media in European countries.

I was in Belgrade a year ago, and had several meetings with journalists, bloggers and NGOs about the freedom of the press. Several of them told me deeply worrying stories.

In other words, this is not only a problem for Serbian journalists, but also a reality that we – Europe – need to handle.

The discussion is crucial in a time of radically changing media landscapes and political and economic strains for Europe.

And what is needed, here as well as abroad is more action than words.

Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Closing statement by Alice Bah Kuhnke Baltic Pride 2016 International Human Rights Conference

Published 04 July 2016 Updated 04 July 2016

Vilnius, 17 June 2016. Check against delivery.

Dear organizers and participants of the conference,

My name is Alice Bah Kuhnke, I am the Minister for Culture and Democracy. I am responsible for LGBTI-equality in the Swedish Government.

This is my first Baltic Pride, so I am honoured by the invitation to deliver this closing speech of the conference. The possibility for discussions on how to advance LGBTI rights is of highest importance in these times, therefore I hope you have had a fruitful conference.

One of the most important missions for me and the Swedish Government is to strive to for an inclusive, diverse society, where everyone can live their lives in freedom, and have their rights promoted and protected.

This vision is as simple as it is complex. You know this better than anyone. What should be the fundamentals of a society are so difficult to achieve. It is incredibly frustrating! Don't you agree?

We are at a crossroads in Europe, where we have a choice. We can choose to go in the direction of darker paths, or we can build inclusive and diverse societies. I know what I and the Swedish Government wants, but we are all concerned about how many other countries there are that want to go in the other direction.

Over the last decades we have seen progress in many countries in Europe and in other parts of the world when it comes to equal rights for lesbian, gay and bisexual persons, such as increasing recognition of same sex relationships. We have also, as you know, seen a much needed focus on the equal rights of transgender and intersex-persons, where several countries have adopted progressive laws setting the standard at a new high.

Yet, many challenges remain. One thing is clear - much of the progress made for LGBTI-equality would not have come about if it wasn't for civil society organisations pushing the agenda forward. And brave people taking a stand for human rights. People like you.

In my own country, Sweden, we have made quite a journey during the last decades. Almost thirty years ago, Sweden became the first country to recognise de facto cohabitation relationships of same sex couples. But it would take another seven years before a formalised legal framework was introduced in terms of civil partnership for same sex couples.

And in 2009 The Marriage Act was amended so that it is now gender neutral. We are now reviewing the regulations of parental leave to be better adapted to families in all their forms.

Our law for gender recognition was set up in 1972, at the time a state of the art law – but now not really modern. The enforced sterilization was ended a few years ago after a long struggle from brave individuals and civil society organisations. Recently, the Swedish Government announced that we will open the possibility for people who were forced to get sterilized under the law, will be able to seek compensation from the state – as far as I know we are the first government in the world to make that kind of a decision.

The debates around these changes were at times loud and inflamed so these changes certainly did not come about without opposition. However after they were introduced they were rather quickly accepted.

Today, existing LGBTI rights are not controversial in Sweden. But it has been a struggle. And every time we have changed a law there have been voices saying that the change will affect society in a negative way. Some even seemed to think that the world would come to an end. Yet, here we are. We've proven them wrong time and time again.

Since this conference is arranged within the framework of Baltic Pride, I am very happy to be part of the march tomorrow.

Pride marches are important in a democratic society as they show a society's capacity to stand up for and protect civil rights.

Pride marches create an opportunity for human rights defenders and LGBTI-organisations to put the spotlight on human rights of LGBTI-persons. And it can't be mentioned enough, civil society play a vital role in democratic countries. Civil society organisations are important in giving LGBTI-rights a voice, and they are equally important as drivers for change in our efforts to combat the violations committed everyday based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

LGBTI-equality is about human rights. The Swedish government's position is perfectly clear: Human rights are universal and apply to all, regardless of who you are or whom you love.

Everyone must be able to live their lives in freedom irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It is a matter of human rights.

Unfortunately, this is not the case in too many countries around the world.

States have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all persons without discrimination. This includes the human rights of LGBTI-persons. It is not a question of opinion or morals – human rights are universal and apply to all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

The development on LGBTI-issues within the EU is not always straight forward. Significant steps have been made, but there is much more that ought to be done.

For us, it is very important to say that the EU is not a cooperation where you can pick and choose. You cannot only be in the union for the economic benefits and skip the promotion of joint values.

This means that all EU countries should take a joint responsibility for people who are fleeing to our continent. And you should safeguard that LGBTI persons can use the freedom of movement like everyone else. This means that we should strive for increased LGBTI equality in all its aspects!

Again, you cannot pick and choose!

Because, respect for human rights and dignity, and the principles of freedom,

democracy, equality and the rule of law, are the common values of the European Union. This is stated in the Treaty of the union and in the EU:s Charter of fundamental rights.

In the EU foreign policy there are guidelines for EU-delegations and Member States, for the promotion and protection of all human rights of LGBTI-persons. This is in order to make our work in this field more operational and systematic. From a Swedish perspective we see that this is not only needed for EU's foreign policy but also internally.

We need to build alliances and work together, governments and civil society organisations.

We also need to work together to highlight the different forms of discrimination – racism and populism is rising in Europe and in other parts of the world. Some leaders even justify racism in the name of LGBTI equality. This can never be accepted and we should never let the advancement of LGBTI rights be hijacked by other agendas.

Let me finish by saying that I would like to congratulate the organizers' that have been able to gather so many committed and knowledgeable persons under this roof. I wish you all the best in your future work. We need you.

A lot has happened, but a lot challenges remain in order to secure human rights for all, and to secure the possibility to be yourself fully, to be the one you know in your heart that you are.

I would like to end with a quote by Tennessee Williams:

"What is straight? A line can be straight, or a street, but the human heart, oh, no, it's curved like a road through mountains."

Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the Nordic Lutheran Bishops Summit

Published 01 July 2016 Updated 01 July 2016

Visby, 28 June 2016. Check against delivery.

Dear Bishops, ladies and gentlemen. It is very inspiring for me to meet you all. In many perspectives you represent tradition, faith, and, not the least, future.

In your hands lie such great possibilities to shape our Nordic Countries, and, with these possibilities, also a great responsibility. The way you, and every priest and welfare worker within your parishes, speak and act, both at a national level and in the local communities, has a great impact on our common way forward. Actually, in many cases, you are the ones who have the best possibility to find and create this common path, where everyone can be included, listened to and inspired to share the political, cultural and religious space in our part of the World.

As in all the Nordic countries, Government and Church have walked a long path together in Sweden. In some way you could say that we were married – at least we lived intimately together for over 400 years. But then, as in many relationships, we came to the conclusion that we were better of separated. The separation in the year 2000 is often referred to as the "divorce" between State and Church.

But actually our separation is not definite, as in many relationships that has been we have ways to take responsibility together, even when we are apart. The Church of Sweden still has public responsibilities in some areas, ruled by laws and contracts between the Church and the government. One of them really matters two us all, sooner or later, namely funerals. Another is the

sacred cultural heritage.

Since the separation, the Church of Sweden is the owner and the manager of the sacred cultural heritage. But still, the sacred cultural heritage belongs to us all, whether we are members of the Church of Sweden or not. That's why we think it is important that the Church of Sweden receives a monetary compensation from the state with the aim to make it possible for the Church to preserve the sacred cultural heritage in accordance with the Heritage Conservation Act.

I must say the Church of Sweden is doing a very good job concerning the sacred cultural heritage. The Church is taking a great responsibility not only in preserving it; As the Government, the Church is also focusing on how to use and to develop the cultural heritage and how to make it accessible and relevant for more people with different backgrounds.

The sacred cultural heritage is a great resource in making an including society. The Swedish government wants to see a Sweden with many stories to be told and different voices to be heard – an including use of cultural heritage. The sacred cultural heritage houses the common heritage in many ways - more ways than many of the secular Swedish recognise. 400 years of marriage between state and church have had an substantial impact. There is a lot to learn and recapture from this history.

People from other parts of the world sometimes know our past better than ourselves.

I've heard of a person from from the Middle East, a refugee, that could tell the guide at a Swedish museum the meaning of the biblical paintings they were looking at. For her it was a living story being told on the painting. To the many secular Swedish people this was definitely not a living cultural heritage. The common cultural heritage is not static, it is developing as people use it, and as we share stories with each other it will be enriched, as will the society.

However, the Swedish Church and the government work together in other areas as well, areas where we share values and objectives, and where the Swedish Church has gained a position of major civil society stakeholder.

As an independent voice, the Swedish Church has taken a stand for equal rights and the equal value of everyone, both by campaigns and debate, in media, in the streets and in the face to face talks to uncountable people in our society.

One matter, crucial to the Swedish society and close to my heart, is the way we welcome and care for people who come to our country in need and vulnerability. People who have sacrificed everything to escape civil war, persecution and oppression.

As you all know, the world is experiencing the greatest migration since the end of World War II. A year ago, this became more and more visible also to us in the Nordic countries. Last year, 163 000 people applied for an asylum in Sweden. That's more than twice as much as in 2014.

70 000 of these were children. We actually know that even more people came to us, people that didn't seek asylum but still needed our help when they arrived.

The situation was the most intense in October and November, when nearly 80 000 asylum seekers sought a safe haven in our country. The capacity of Swedish authorities was at the point of exhaustion, and there was an acute need for beds, blankets, food and human care.

I have talked of this many times, but it still moves me and fills me with great pride to think of the way the civil society organisations in Sweden gathered forces and stepped in, quickly and with impressive strength. Thousands of people from all parts of Swedish society volunteered and were mobilised, both by long time established organisations and by new initiatives responding to the situation. In all this, the Swedish Church stood out as one of the bravest, strongest and most dedicated helper we ever have witnessed.

Like no other organisation I can think of, The Swedish Church reaches out to all parts of Sweden. Parishes all over the country engaged in assisting the refugees, by distributing food and clothes, offering temporary housing in parish buildings, supporting people by listening and giving advice. In many places, The Swedish Church coordinated the local efforts and cooperated with other civil society organisations. In some parts of Sweden, the town church became the local centre for help and contacts.

The whole of The Swedish Church is flourishing with many admirable initiatives, such as language cafés, choirs and sport activities, spreading hope and meaning amongst asylum seekers. And much of this is still going on today. Cooperation has included people and organisations from all parts of society, regardless of religious affiliation, and many new contacts all over our society have added to mutual understanding and respect.

To contribute to their achievements, the Swedish government last December

granted extra funds to NOG:s, educational associations, the sports movement and faith communities for their efforts for migrants. The Swedish Church received the largest sum amongst faith communities.

I remember very well a visit to the church of Saint Catherine in Stockholm in November. Together with the Mosque of Stockholm, the parish offered food, clothes, a shower and a place to sleep, to several hundred people, day after day, for months. Volunteers from the church and the mosque worked side by side. This great tragedy also brought people together, from different parts of Europe and from different parts of our own society.

This was by no means a unique example. Parishes of The Swedish Church all over the country have initiated interfaith networks and activities, both before, under and after the refugee situation last year. As Minister for issues regarding faith communities, my top priority is to enhance interfaith dialogue.

I believe in the good forces created when people meet face to face and get to know each other. The Swedish government is doing all that we can for a Sweden that keeps together. I see interfaith cooperation as a key element to that aim, and I see The Swedish Church as a key partner in making this possible.

We are indeed officially divorced, and even if more can be done with our relationship we work together better than ever!

Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Opening address by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the 12th international conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research

Published 30 June 2016 Updated 30 June 2016

Stockholm, 29 June 2016. Check against delivery.

Dear friends, as the minister of Culture and Democracy and on behalf of the Swedish government, I am honored to welcome you to Sweden and to Stockholm for the 12th international conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research, which is taking place in a Nordic country for the very first time.

Apart from everything the conference has to offer, I am happy that you are here at such a wonderful time of year, which must surely enhance your enjoyment of the visit.

Now, allow me some pride in stating that this small country of Sweden has a long history of research in many fields and that we hold a position as a research nation. Since the beginning of the 1990s civil society has increasingly been the main concern for a number of academic institutions, among them of course your host for this conference, the Institute for Civil Society Studies at Ersta Sköndal University College.

This is very important, as the contributions of civil society, and the role it played in our society, was for a long time overlooked. My opinion is that this has changed, for the benefit of all of society.

Swedish civil society organizations, foundations and representatives have been deeply involved in and contributed enormously to the creation of this conference, as, I might add, has the Swedish government. It has been carried

out in a spirit of cooperation, which we value a lot.

Given this context, in what way can Sweden and Stockholm be of interest to all of you researchers from other countries? Well, we also tend to be proud of the fact that Swedish civil society stands out in international comparison both in terms of number of membership associations and share of active citizens among the population.

The civil society has built our society. Most decision-makers in Swedish politics have some background in civil society – including myself.

We also have a quite low degree of professional staff and a focus as much on voice as on service, in our civil society.

And here I take the opportunity to stress the Government's view of civil society as a pluralistic political and ideological arena where individual opinions, religious beliefs and political positions can be formulated and developed, and get the chance of being expressed in action. This is a fundamental part of any real democracy.

But let me at the same time underline that the possibilities and limitations on civil society in relation to the state as well as to the other spheres of society are not carved in stone. Nor can it, in any simple way, once and for all be defined. It is changing, since our societies change.

In Sweden recently we have seen how civil society adapts quickly to changing situations. Last year the number of asylum seekers in Sweden increased dramatically, from 81 000 in 2014 to nearly 163 000 in 2015. Only during October and November, nearly 76 000 persons applied for asylum. This was a challenge for our structures.

In the efforts of central and local government to master the situation we are deeply impressed and dependent of the important support of organized civil society as well as the great amount of spontaneous individual input, both with regard to first reception and the more long-term work of integration and inclusion. But here we still have a lot to learn, not least from the experiences of other countries.

One important lesson that we've learnt during these times, is how important it is with strong voices from civil society. I mentioned this earlier, but I want to make sure you heard me – we want a civil society that challenges the Government to do more, to do better. We want their strong critical voices.

When other countries want to silence civil society when they raise their voices, we invite them to the table. It is what any responsible Government should do – in my opinion.

Finally, of course in order for us politicians to make better decisions on regulations for civil society, the dialogue between research, civil society and the public sector are necessary. In this way this conference is contributing to the creation and strengthening of contacts between academia and practice, which we believe to be value to all involved.

Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the Museums in Times of Migration and Mobility conference

Published 03 June 2016 Updated 03 June 2016

Malmö, 25 May 2016. Check against delivery.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I am honoured to be here in Malmö and to have the opportunity to address you all before you start this conference. From the government's point of view this conference is something that we have impatiently awaited for a long time. Today we start a cross-sector initiative concerning a momentous issue of our time.

It is quite obvious that this conference, which will be the scientific outset for what is planned to be a museum of migration, is held here in Malmö and that the initiative is taken by the City of Malmö. Malmö is - and now I risk to offend someone - Sweden's gateway to the rest of the world. For a long time Malmö has welcomed people from all over the world. It is a young and vibrant city that in no way pretend that the future doesn't hold any challenges or difficulties.

Quite the opposite; in a time of radical change, possibilities are identified and implemented in a quite impressive speed. This was not at least shown during last year when Sweden welcomed 163 000 refugees to Sweden. In many regions, and especially the Malmö region the systems were stretched to their limits.

I am proud of what many Swedes have done and are doing for all the people fleeing war and persecution. Even though the needs are immense, Sweden as a small country has been able to offer many refugees safety and shelter and maybe some peace of mind. Finally they might feel safe. But are they at

home? No, that is something different.

Home is a place to leave and a place to come back to. Home is where you keep your most loved objects and where you feel safe with your loved ones. A home bears our memories and it is a place to rest and feel safe.

The Swedish author Viveka Sjögren explains this in an exquisite and beautiful way in her children's book "Om du skulle fråga Micha" (If you would ask Micha). With colourful pictures and few words she gives the reader a nuanced story of fleeing and finding a new home, and she does it from a child's perspective. How a piece of torn wallpaper, still bearing the smell of the old home, becomes the most precious belonging to someone who has no other choice than to create a new home, this time starting from nothing.

But of course, no one comes from nothing. We all hold cultural assets that make us who we are. Millions of Swedes have their roots in other countries than Sweden. A museum that gathers all the different aspects of migration is therefore something that will be of importance for all citizens of Sweden.

The idea of creating a museum, an independent institution with various types of missions with migration as the main theme will be an important step to actually recognize migration as a major part of Swedish history and cultural heritage. A museum has the ability to seize the different aspects of the past and present and be relevant in many ways. If this becomes reality in Malmö it will be the first of its kind in Europe. And for me as a politician it would be an important step on the road to build a more inclusive society.

But it is not my task as a politician to get involved in details about which aspects should be reflected, no, that is something that should grow in a continuous dialogue, with no political interference. Museums are and shall remain knowledge institutions. We sometimes see small tendencies of politicians, also on local level, who make comments on what is shown in museums or who like to dictate how sensitive topics connected to identity or cultural heritage should be approached. This is not acceptable in any way.

So dear friends, I will not stay for this conference, but I urge you to use this unique opportunity, when we have the pick of the researchers on migration issues on one place, to put your heads together and use all your brilliance to create something unprecedented. Grasp this opportunity.

Thank you and good luck!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at The Forest of Venice exhibition

Published 31 May 2016 Updated 31 May 2016

Venice, 26 May 2016. Check against delivery.

Ladies and gentleman, representatives from the press,

I am very thankful for the invitation to open the press preview of this exciting exhibition The Forest of Venice. Allow me to especially thank Kjellander + Sjöberg and Folkhem, who are the producers of this exhibition. Also big thanks to The Swedish Institute, Swedish Wood, Sveaskog and Martinsons who have all supported the exhibition.

I am grateful to be here at the biennial during this years theme - Reporting from the front – because it focuses on issues that are very important to me. Today, Europe faces many urgent challenges. Across the sea, people are leaving their homes out of fear. Across Europe and many other places too, we see cities and countries leading the way to accommodate new homes and new beginnings.

In an urbanised world architecture has become the living environment on which we depend so much in our daily lives. Quality in architecture has become crucial to the quality of life.

Architecture is not only a shared environment; it is also necessarily an output of collective effort. Architecture require that we work together, make a plan – to start from and to guide the work. My hope is that the process of building should always originate from, and support, the needs of human beings.

We have to share a feeling of responsibility that what we produce will eventually, in part or in whole, be given away to others to utilize. It must function in the present as well as for future generations. And the big challenge is, of course, the climate change.

I believe that we are all here today because we also share a vision of a climate smart, resilient and sustainable future. A vision in which forests play an important role.

Coming from the north, we are used to harsh environments. Our houses have to be strong and resilient to keep the cold out. Our houses have predominantly been built and heated by wood for centuries. We have a long history and craftsmanship of building wooden structures.

However, wood is not only good for the cold and stormy weather. The beauty of wood is that it is breathable and suitable for all types of weather and climate. Wood is climate smart. And building with wood is not limited to small houses for single households. Today we build high apartment houses in central locations. An increased number of wooden constructions contributes to reducing emissions as it replaces less climate-efficient materials.

Today forests cover approximately two thirds of Sweden and they provide multiple products and services. Thus, you can say that forests are an important part of our natural and cultural heritage.

I hope you all will be inspired by this exhibition. I hope that you will see the transformative change for the world's climate, future architecture and urban planning that forests and wood can bring about for our common habitat.

Enjoy the exhibition!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the opening of the Nordic Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2016

Published 31 May 2016 Updated 31 May 2016

Venice, 26 May 2016. Check against delivery.

Excellencies, Dear friends,

We live in a rapidly changing world – with many anxieties. Capital flows freely across borders, people flee from their native countries, established democracies are challenged by division and political extremists, authoritarian regimes are rolling back freedom of expression. And last but not least: Climate threat presses for changes on all levels of society. This seems to be a time of transgressions of a sort that forces us to reconsider the fundamentals of society and of human values.

The Nordic exhibition in this biennale puts forth important architectural work seen through the lenses of three themes: Foundational, Belonging and Recognition.

These themes seem to me to be addressing crucial questions of this disturbed time. In an urbanised world architecture has become the living environment on which we depend so much in our daily lives. Quality in architecture has become crucial to the quality of life. And in this fluid age architecture may have a pertinent contribution by the sheer fact of its slowness, its relative permanence, its "longue durée": being a more still point in the rapid flow of Time.

Architecture is not only a shared environment; it is also necessarily an outflow of collective effort. To make it we have to work together, make a plan – to depart from and to guide the work. We have to decide on and apply methods we agree on. We have to negotiate and we have to invest.

There is also a distinct feeling of responsibility that what we produce will, in part or in whole, be given away to others to live and use. It must function now and in the long run.

But the design is more than function. The final articulation involves formal choices, giving the work a profound cultural meaning. The Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa speaks of architecture as an impure and messy discipline, being on the one hand a practical, utilitarian craft and on the other an art. Even if messy, he holds that: "Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings. In fact, this is the function of all meaningful art. "

But has this become an invalid perspective? In a situation when urbanisation and urgent needs in society have to be addressed on a scale without precedents. How do we still speak about human values and practise architecture to its full potential when the main focus seems to be on quantity and speed?

Looking ahead and looking for hope are among the expectations of this year's biennale. We are in a continuing process of building and rebuilding this society, whether we like it or not. And to do this we need to understand the movements inside our society, what defines our belonging, what values are at stake and, in my mind especially important, what constitutes fairness in the living environment.

My hope is connected to the idea that in the process of building we should always depart from and support the needs of the human being. And look at architecture not as something in itself, abstracted from its beginning, but as a process that serves the human needs at its origin. This implies processes of broad engagement, mutual respect and profound dialogue.

To build is to be involved in what has been called a "wicked problem". It is to place oneself in what might seem to be a jungle/maze of agendas and dilemmas. For a wicked problem there is not one evident solution. And yet one has to decide, to make a decision that not only solves the problem but one that brings new values to its inhabitants. Not a solution we can live with, but one we would want to live with. This is the sign of excellence of the architect.

And we must see to that the emblematic ladder of this Biennale doesn't turn out to be the new ivory tower. To be honest, I am ambivalent about this image of a perspective from above. But the ladder implies the dual

movement of climbing and descending. Of course we have to rise above the immediate flow of circumstances, to get the bigger picture. But lots of problems built into the structures of modern cities seem to stem from a too high-flying perspective.

Given all these complexities it is perhaps not so surprising that we must get ourselves into a Therapy – as is proposed in this Nordic exhibition. This means not looking at things from a detached bird's perspective but to start down below, with an inner dialogue. "Know thy self", as the Delphic maxim goes. It will stand as a counterpoint to an "all-knowing" perspective. As I understand it, the introspective Subject on the couch is or should be Society itself, with all its conflicting layers.

And in this process: let's not forget to put that hope into the work we do. Without hope the work won't move forward.

With this I declare the Nordic Pavilion of the 2016 Biennale opened!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the 2016 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award ceremony

Published 31 May 2016 Updated 31 May 2016

Stockholm, 30 May 2016. Check against delivery.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear laureate Meg Rosoff,

Taking care of small children can be exhausting. They don't sleep, they don't eat, they constantly make a mess – and they take a surreal amount of time to get dressed. But of course; they are small, soft and they smell nice.

And it is amazing to discover the world in their company, they point out the obvious things that we had forgotten but love to get to know again; how fluffy a bumblebee is or how fun it can be to mess with clay.

With teenagers in the family things are slightly different. They leave us more time, they get dressed and organize their own social life. But they confront us with something that is not as easy to wipe off as it is to clean sticky fingers or to dry tears after a scrubbed knee.

They confront us with questions about life and pure existence; who am I? Can I be whoever I want? Where is my place in the world? Teenagers pinpoint the essence of life in a way that can be quite painful for us adults. And as adults we still remember how strong these feelings could be and how devastating the consequences of our action could appear. The self-centeredness of teenage life makes us embarrassed.

Teenage-years are a bit like no man's land. No one is invited to come close and there are no clear sign posts for direction. It is comfortable for the rest of us to keep it on a certain distance. And it can be awfully difficult to dig into our teenagers' emotions since it forces us to reflect on our own lives.

Someone who doesn't fear this is this year's laurate of the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award; Meg Rosoff.

Dear Meg Rosoff, you are brave enough to dive into teenagers' minds and you create a world where they are the most important persons. A world where a young boy causes natural disasters in the world depending of which girl he falls in love with. You point out that having "Imaginary Companions" is not necessarily something that can be useful only for small children. Your main characters struggle with the same issues that all teenagers do, but they find new, unconventional and creative ways to deal with them.

Death, love and identity; you avoid none of these questions that parents might fear when saying good night to their teenager after a full day at work. You are certainly not making life comfortable.

Just like Astrid Lindgren, Meg Rosoff does not fear the most difficult questions in life. Despite Astrid Lindgren's often idyllic scenery, questions about life, love and death always lie under the surface. Meg Rosoff handles these questions in a unique and unpredictable way – and that is one reason why her work is loved by so many and why she today is being awarded the largest prize for literature for children in the world.

Meg Rosoff's work echoes the message in the work of Astrid Lindgren; "Ask all the questions, declare all your fears, I will not provide you with the answers but I will stand by your side". This is the way that also Astrid Lindgren's authorship has worked for millions of children around the world. Both Lindgren and Rosoff have also been champions in making young people look upon book reading as a perfectly normal and fun thing to do.

Dear Meg Rosoff, you give our young ones strength to be who they want. Their search for identity can be painful, but it is extremely important for society as a whole that everyone can live their full potential. To become citizens with democratic values who are eager to defend their freedom or fight for it.

Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at a hearing on anti-Gypsyism

Published 19 May 2016 Updated 19 May 2016

Stockholm, 18 May 2016. Check against delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, Members of parliament,

It is an honour for me to be here today and to introduce the subject for discussion during the hearing this morning.

Let me start with the words of Rosa Taikon, the famous silversmith, Roma activist and sister of the Swedish human rights icon, Katarina Taikon. She describes the ban on Roma entering Sweden from 1914 to 1954 like this:

"We were considered a despicable and inferior race. Roma who survived persecution by the Nazis weren't permitted to enter the country following the end of the Second World War. Roma received no help or support as survivors. The entry ban also tells us something about how undesirable we Roma who were already within Sweden's borders were. It is outrageous that nothing much has actually changed in terms of the antiziganistic and negative notions about Roma since the time when we were banned from entering the country. How is it possible that Roma are, even today, so undesirable?"

This quote can be read in the White Paper on Abuses and Rights Violations Against Roma in the 20th Century called the "The Dark Unknown History". This and other policies against Roma during the last century, described in the White Paper, are indeed a dark part of my country's history.

The White Paper, published by the Government two year ago, is intended to give recognition to victims and their relatives, help raise awareness of anti-Gypsyism and increase understanding of the situation of the Roma minority.

Fortunately, The White Paper has been very well received. Roma people, authorities and majority population have shown great interest in it. This is very encouraging – broad support means that we are well placed to increase knowledge about our history, of which anti-Gypsyism is a part.

Therefore, the White Paper plays an important role in Sweden's efforts to fully include Roma in society and to fight the racism and discrimination faced by Roma today. A greater understanding of our history will enable an effective development of long-term initiatives for Roma inclusion.

And let me be clear about one thing: anti-Gypsyism is a form of racism and therefore incompatible with the values that a democratic Europe stands for. Sweden is concerned that the precarious situation of Roma has worsened within Europe. And that anti-Gypsyism is not something that Sweden is free from. Not at all.

It is important that political leaders in Europe recognize and condemn acts of discrimination and hatred against Roma with the same clarity as other types of racism are condemned.

The Swedish Government has an integrated approach in its work against anti-Gypsyism and for Roma inclusion. Measures are carried out in several areas, such as employment, education, health and housing.

The fundamental starting point for the implementation is a strong human rights perspective.

In line with this we are implementing a targeted long term strategy for Roma inclusion since 2012 with an ambitious and proactive goal: a Roma who turns 20 years of age in 2032 will have the same opportunities in life as a non-Roma.

Some progress can be seen after the first four years of work. For instance, Roma mediators have been trained and employed within the areas of education, work, social services and health. They have contributed to Roma pupils attending school to a greater extent, to Roma enrolling at local public employment offices and getting jobs and to bridging the trust gap between Roma and the public sector.

In this context, it is important to stress the significance of participation and influence of Roma civil society at all levels. Their experience, knowledge and skills are crucial if we want to succeed in this endeavour.

But we are very aware of the challenges that remain. Therefore, during this spring we are upgrading the strategy with new funding and measures to expand the activities to new areas of work.

At the same time we are awaiting the final report of the Commission against anti-Gypsyism that very soon will be presented to the Government.

The Commission, chaired by Mr Thomas Hammarberg and comprised by a majority of Roma representatives, has spent two years fighting anti-Gypsyism in society through various efforts. The Commission has contributed to highlight the widespread prejudices against Roma and the increased discrimination experienced by the group.

One of the Commission's achievements is the publication of education material based on the White Paper, which they have disseminated widely to all schools in Sweden and other relevant places of work.

Furthermore, the Government is currently preparing a national plan against racism and hate crime. We believe that it is important to make visible the different forms of racism, their nature and particularities, so our fight against racism and hate crime can be more effective.

For that reason, the plan includes measures against afrophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Gypsyism, islamophobia, racism against Sami people, homophobia and transphobia.

The element of recognition and participation is important in this process. During the past autumn I had several dialogue meetings with representatives of groups that are victims of different sorts of racism. Their experiences and proposals have been a very important contribution to the preparation of the plan.

Around forty years ago Katarina Taikon told leading politicians in Sweden the following words:

"You KNOW! And nobody will tell me that you do not know these people are persecuted because of their heritage. It is your duty to understand it! "

We're all in this room in powerful positions in our respective countries. My message to us today is to listen to the words of Katarina Taikon, do our duty and keep working for full respect for the Roma people's human rights.

I would like to end wishing you fruitful discussion today. My hope is that this

hearing will increase the knowledge about the situation of Roma today, the anti-Gypsyism that still exists in Europe, to speed up action on Roma rights and inspire change.

Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at MTM's conference "Take Part"

Published 19 May 2016 Updated 19 May 2016

Stockholm, 17 May 2016. Check against delivery.

Your majesty, dear friends, I too would like to welcome you to Stockholm and Take Part! I am thrilled to be here and to have the opportunity to address you all before you start this conference.

The Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, MTM today's host, receives its mandate from the Swedish Parliament as well as the Government and the Ministry of Culture.

That mandate is to ensure that people with reading impairments can access literature, daily newspapers, and community information, regardless of reading ability, regardless of literacy and regardless of disabilities.

Easy access to information is also the goal of the international DAISY Consortium that is co-hosting today's conference, well expressed in their motto "Creating the best way to read and publish".

Sweden has a long tradition of international cooperation regarding accessible solutions and technological developments. The DAISY system is as you all know a Swedish invention that became an international standard.

The title of the conference Take Part – Human Perspectives on Inclusive Publishing - reflects the focus of the conference: accessibility in a broad perspective, where democracy and accessibility are considered as prerequisites for full participation in society.

The link between technological development and functionality is vital to ensure that everyone has access to information based on the person's needs and functional abilities. The right to everyone to information and

participation is essential in an inclusive society

As you know, every two years the DAISY Consortium, in collaboration with the hosting country, organises a technical meeting in order to present new findings, analyse future needs of development, share experiences and deepen contacts with commercial actors in the field.

This year, 2016, the DAISY Consortium celebrates its 20th anniversary and you do it in the way you like the best, by organising a meeting where global skills assemble to share information and experience, to enhance a democratic society where information is accessible and where everybody can take part.

The goal for me as minister for culture and democracy is to safeguard the democratic right to information, in a way that complies with the needs of the person. This is a matter of democracy, a matter of human rights and also of course a matter of access to culture. All of which are central to me, and to the government.

The government is constantly working with accessibility. In the negotiations of EU-directives concerning web accessibility and the new general directive on accessibility that is currently being circulated. The new Swedish discrimination act now states that lack of accessibility is a form of discrimination.

We live in a time when all countries have to return to our core values of humanism, democracy and inclusion. In this work, equal access to literature and culture is fundamental. In a time where information is vital to be able to be an active partaker in society, access to information is fundamental. It cannot be underlined enough.

I once again welcome you here and I hope that you will have a productive and inspiring meeting!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the announcement of the 2016 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award laureate

Published 05 April 2016 Updated 05 April 2016

Stockholm, 5 April 2016. Check against delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, here in Stockholm and in Bologna,

With her many books, Astrid Lindgren has given us unforgettable characters and unique stories. They are friends to return to throughout life. In much of her work, the feeling of home is very strong.

Either a home created by adults; like in the stories about Emil in Lönneberga and the children in Bullerbyn, or as in the books about Pippi Longstocking, a home created by a child and her imagination.

In Nils Karlsson Pyssling, the items that we connect to home are incredibly big; a bath can be taken in a tea cup and a meatball lasts a whole day. Still, Astrid reminds us of what makes a home; somewhere familiar, where we can rest and feel safe.

Research shows that the simple practice of sitting on someone's lap and being read to enhances a child's experience of literature. To feel surrounded by warmth and love makes it easier for the little ones to be brave enough to take on a new adventure. I believe it is the same thing with a home. A home is a place where we can relax and feel secure. It is also a place to leave and come back to.

Of course, today my thoughts go to all the children fleeing from war, coming to new countries, many of them are coming to Sweden. Finally they might

feel safe. But are they at home? No, that is something different.

The Swedish author Viveka Sjögren explains this in an exquisite and beautiful way in her book "Om du skulle fråga Micha" (If you would ask Micha). With colourful pictures and few words she gives the reader a nuanced story of fleeing and finding a new home, and she does it from a child's perspective. How a piece of torn wallpaper, still bearing the smell of the old home, becomes the most precious belonging to someone who has no other choice than to create a new home, this time starting from nothing.

We must not forget this. We, who everyday can go to a place that we call home, surrounded by things that bear our memories. We owe it to the refugees coming to Sweden, to help them feel at home with us, to get to know the country they live in.

Literature is an effective way to get to know the world. I very much appreciate the initiative taken by Swedish authors, publishers and libraries to introduce Swedish literature to children that have arrived in our country.

And today we celebrate a great day for children's literature; when the laurate of the world's greatest prize of literature for children will be presented. Last year, the ALMA- prize was awarded to the South African organization PRAESA which introduced me and millions of other to their outstanding work. I actually visited them this January and took part of the work carried out in a reading club for children in a township outside Cape Town. Now I am excited to experience this year's laurate.

I am very proud to leave the floor to the president of the ALMA-jury Boel Westin. Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at Paideia

Published 23 March 2016 Updated 23 March 2016

Stockholm, 22 March 2016 Check against delivery.

Your Excellences, Bruno Schulz fellows, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's attack on the capital city of Europe is an attack against European freedom. In the heart of the political melting pot terrorism tragically killed people but terrorism can never be allowed to win over democratic ideas, democratic values. Terrorism can never be allowed to kill the lifelong believe in the fight for democracy that the Swedish government, I and many with us work for every day.

Today we are gathered here to share and celebrate this ceremony and I honor the lost life's of today's tragically attack in Bruxelles by continuing doing this.

By acknowledging your contribution to the preservation, development and sharing of our common cultural heritage.

Not even a century ago, Jewish people and culture were seen much differently in Sweden. In 1922, Sweden was the first country in the world to establish an institute for racial biology, for the preservation of the so called Swedish race. Jewish refugees were stopped at the Swedish border and sent back to Nazi Germany, during the 1930:s and even when the second World War had started.

The foundation of Paideia in the year 2000 was a clear statement: Sweden is to be a country that helps rebuilding what the Nazis tried to rob from Europe and its Jewish people: their history, their literature, their science and their cultural heritage.

Sweden is also a country that learns its lesson, stopping racism and intolerance from spreading any further in our society of today. In 2003, we founded The Living History Forum, to fight for tolerance, democracy and human rights, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as its starting point.

The task includes education against antisemitism, afrophobia, anti-Gypsyism, islamophobia, homophobia and transphobia.

Several other bodies are involved in our struggle against discrimination and prejudice. For example, the National Agency for Education is carrying through measures to raise the level of awareness in school of xenophobia and intolerance, spreading methods and training school staff.

Despite the efforts of the Government and many others, we see difficult times, at present and in the future. Anti-democratic and racist views are spreading again and influencing our public space, political debate and everyday life encounters. Once again, people experience risks connected to showing religious, often Jewish, affiliation, belief and traditions.

Acknowledging these risks, I still wish to take this opportunity to urge for openness. I strongly believe we can reach much further by being open. Maybe only by being open can we reach far enough.

This past year, Sweden has experienced the greatest stream of refugees since the Second World War.

Sweden would not have managed to meet their needs, had it not been for civil society organisations, not the least faith communities. The situation was particularly heavy in Malmö, where most refugees arrived. The local Jewish community expressed concerns, experiencing threats.

In such situations, I believe we have a choice. Should we protect what we fear is threatened by closing a circle around it and keeping it safe? Or should we defend it by showing it, sharing it and using it for an exchange of views with others?

The Jewish community of Malmö reached out a hand. One of the most active members of the community joined the Muslim organisers and worked tirelessly at the central station to help those arriving. What an achievement for people in need, and what an achievement for understanding and cooperation!

Every year, the commemoration of the Holocaust Remembrance Day absorbs and moves me. One of the messages from this year's commemoration comes to my mind: In his speech in the Great Synagogue of Stockholm, the Chairman of the Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, Aron Verständig, said he wanted to open the beautiful synagogue to everyone. Not only to the ones that love it, but also to the ones that hate it.

Dear Bruno Schulz fellows, you have now completed your studies at Paideia, and your mission continues throughout Europe. Your mission to revive a European Jewish voice and to contribute to a culturally rich and pluralistic Europe.

Take this opportunity also to reach out. Your achievements may enrich people regardless of faith or ethnic origin. We all need each other, now more than ever, to form a new open minded Europe.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the Women in the Creative Industries Day

Published 14 March 2016 Updated 14 March 2016

London, 9 March 2016. Check against delivery.

Distinguished members of the panel, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to participate in this third edition of the Women in the Creative Industries Day, as part of this year's Women of the World Festival.

I am proudly standing in front of you today, as a Minister of a feminist government. In fact, you should all be proud, because the achievements of the brave collective struggle throughout history, which you in this room are all a part of, have paved the way for me to gain such an office. For that I am thankful, and inspired, although not at all satisfied.

As was mentioned in my introduction, I am Minister both for Culture and for Democracy. I have often been asked what the connection is between these two policy areas. This question has not one but many answers. Let me give you one that shines a light on the importance of our discussion here today.

The ideas, products, services and values generated in the culture and creative sectors are part of the solution to challenges facing society today. With that being said, it is important to admit, that this sector has almost the same inequality issues as the society it is part of. For example, not even a third of the managers in cultural and creative industries are women. Compared with the average of all business sectors, it is better, but far from satisfying.

The Swedish Government strongly believes in the importance that people

throughout the country and in all parts of society are offered opportunities to take part in arts and culture and to discover their own creativity. For it is a fundamental principle that arts and culture have a value in themselves, for every individual that makes contact with it. This is the core of what it means being Minister both for Culture and for Democracy.

To achieve gender equality in the cultural sector, the Swedish Government sees the importance of taking concrete measures to tackle current imbalances. Five government agencies in Sweden, representing different fields of art, carry a special assignment to work with methods to foster equality today. But we also need to mainstream gender issues in all sectors. So that when the children of today grow up to be professionals in the creative sector, they will have chosen the paths they want to tread, and not those paths others have put them on.

To get everybody on the same starting-point, we need knowledge of specific obstacles that a specific group encounter. Therefore I am looking forward to listen to you all today. I am so happy that a renowned cultural institution such as Southbank Centre is so committed to opening up new paths for everyone, regardless of sex and gender.

I am also happy that Southbank Centre will be the stage for a big Nordic cultural event all through 2017, where cultural actors from the Nordic countries will get the chance to dissect issues such as gender equality.

And lastly, I am extremely glad to be here today and to let myself be inspired of the great minds you have gathered.

Thank you all!



Speech from Ministry of Culture, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

High Level Segment of the 31st session of the Human Rights Council Geneva

Published 03 March 2016 Updated 03 March 2016

Geneva, 1 March 2016. Statement delivered by Minister for Culture and Democracy Alice Bah Kuhnke.

Mr. Vice President, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address the Human Rights Council today. Ten years since its establishment, this Council still serves as the main UN human rights forum. This is an important opportunity to take stock of our achievements and look ahead to future challenges.

It is a great achievement that many people have seen their countries go through democratic transitions. Democracy beyond free and fair elections has taken important steps globally: if you are a woman active in politics, your chance of being elected to parliament have doubled compared to twenty years ago.

However, this development cannot be taken for granted. The Swedish Government is especially concerned by three tendencies that I will address today:

- firstly, shrinking democratic space for journalists and civil society,
- secondly, gender inequalities, as well as continued opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights,
- and finally, the human rights of persons in increased risk of vulnerability, such as persons belonging to minorities, LGBTI persons and migrants.

Mr. Vice President,

My Government is deeply concerned about the troubling situation regarding freedom of expression, and in particular freedom of the media.

Free and independent media is a foundation of democracy and rule of law. As such, the safety of journalists concerns all of us. Across the world, human rights defenders, journalists, bloggers, lawyers, publishers and union leaders work courageously and tirelessly to promote the rule of law and human rights.

We witness a continuing high number of reprisals, murders and other acts of violence committed against these human rights defenders, sometimes by States.

In addition, civic space is shrinking in many countries. Legal restrictions against the civil society have been imposed in more than 50 countries during the last years. A growing number of democratic activists are sentenced to years in prison on false allegations.

This year, the first Swedish Freedom of the Press Act celebrates 250 years. It still functions as a cornerstone of our legal system and a guardian of freedom of expression in Sweden.

We should all protect the voices of journalists and human rights defenders who demand their legitimate, universal rights every day.

I urge us all to expand the freedom of expression, freedom of the media and freedom for the civil society, in all states in this Human Rights Council.

Mr. Vice President,

Domestic violence against women remains a global plague. It is the most common form of violence against women and girls, affecting more than a third of all women. This means that over a billion women globally are victims of violence.

No country in the world, not even my own, is exempted. In Sweden, around 20 women die every year as a result of domestic violence. This is completely unacceptable.

I represent a feminist Government, for us the empowerment of women is a key priority. There is still a lot of work to be done. Our efforts emphasize the

enjoyment of human rights of women, increased access to resources and more representation for women.

I want to highlight the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is a cornerstone in the full realization of human rights and in our strife to ensure a better life for women and girls.

For instance, complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the second largest cause of death for 15-19 year old girls globally.

This must change. Sweden will continue to be a driving force for women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights. I urge you to join us in this work.

Mr. Vice President,

Racism, persecution of LGBTI-persons, discrimination of indigenous peoples and migrants require urgent action.

These acts are infecting our communities. It denies our equal value as humans and our human rights. It is an obstacle to development. It causes suffering for the individual.

I urge us all to combat this persecution wherever it is manifested. We cannot accept these acts.

My Government is committed to strengthen the protection of human rights – in Sweden and beyond. Allow me to mention a few initiatives:

- First, later this spring, the Government will present communications to the Swedish parliament covering Swedish priorities and policy on human rights, democracy and the rule of law – both nationally and in our foreign policy efforts. One important component is the proposal to Parliament to establish an independent national human rights institution in conformity with the Paris Principles.

- Secondly, we are now developing our third national action plan on implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. It is built on broad consultations with actors in Sweden and conflict/post-conflict countries and will focus on women's inclusion and meaningful participation in peace processes. If elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in June, Sweden would be a strong advocate for the women, peace and security agenda.

- Thirdly, business and respect for human rights should be part of an active corporate social responsibility policy. That's why Sweden last year proudly became the sixth country in the world to adopt a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.

In conclusion, let me end by saying that much has indeed happened during the 70 years since the UN was founded.

However, one important aspect remains. We as Governments still have the responsibility to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights for all, upon which we all have agreed. This is the obligation of every Government.

Let's address these urgent matters together.

I thank you, Mr. Vice President.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the opening show of Fashion Week

Published 01 February 2016 Updated 01 February 2016

Stockholm, 1 February 2016. Check against delivery.

I want to begin by thanking you for inviting me to come here. It is a great honor for me to open this spring's edition of Stockholm Fashion Week.

As Minister for Culture and Democracy – it thrills me a lot that fashion and design now plays an equally important role with other artistic fields. For what is fashion if not an artistic and creative expression?

When I was seven years old and experienced my first days at school, I found a hat at my granny's loft. It wasn't any hat, according to me, it was the most beautiful belonging one could possibly carry.

Not being like any other seven year old kid from the beginning, when sporting a big red hat to school – this was made even clearer to me by the older guys from sixth grade first thing as I entered the school yard.

That's a disgusting and ugly hat! Take it off, they shouted! If you don't take it off you will be punished. And beaten up I was.

After two weeks filled with constant shouting, threats and beating my mother asked me if I was not to take of the hat.

I told her the truth. The hat was quit missfitting, but still warm and still it was not as beautiful as I first considered it to be but that I could not take it off since this would mean that others decided for me what to wear and what not to wear. With pride I kept on carrying the damn hat until it had to be washed and then went into two pieces.

I believe fashion is a form of a universal language which allows constructing and deconstructing our identities, to play whatever role we want by shaping our look to show certain attitudes or values. It's always been amazing to me how quickly a piece of clothing can change how I feel, how I hold myself, and even how I act.

Fashion as a phenomenon is something that is very dynamic and in constant change, and especially in the globalized world we live in. And the Swedish fashion industry holds up well in the tough competition and has enjoyed great success both nationally and internationally. Fashion, form and design are elements that for decades characterized the rest of the world picture of Sweden.

Fashion sector employs a large group of people at all stages from production to design and marketing - but also all those who currently subsist on to write, analyze, shoot, commenting and blogging about fashion.

If the fashion industry has many challenges today, sustainability is definitively one of these. Today, people in rich countries are linked to people in poor countries through the commoditization and consumption of what is called fashion. As a former Secretary General for the organization Fairtrade I have spent much time taking part at the first level regarding the fashion production. I have cried in anger over the injustices as I have cried with joy when seeing what happens with consumers and a branch of industry when consciousness increases.

Sustainable fashion is a part of the growing design philosophy and trend of sustainability, the goal of which is to create a system which can be supported indefinitely in terms of human impact on the environment and social responsibility. I am thrilled that many fashion designers are now introducing eco-conscious methods at the source through the use of environmentally friendly materials and socially responsible methods of production. But this question constantly needs to be debated and challenged, which I am sure will also take place during this fashion week, when a large part of the Swedish fashion industry is concentrated.

Last but not least I hope that the Swedish fashion industry keeps on being brave so that seven year old girls far away from Stockholm can keep on being inspired and dare to dress their lust in whatever funny hat they like to without taking it of regardless of any given resistance. And with these final words I hereby wish you a fabulous fashion week that I now declare officially to be opened!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the Femdefenders Day Seminarium

Published 27 November 2015 Updated 27 November 2015

Stockholm, 27 November 2015. Check against delivery.

Dear friends,

the world is a dangerous place for young women. Especially for femdefenders.

Women who stand up for gender equality and peace are particularly at risk of being subjected to discrimination and violence. We call them femdefenders – the most courageous young women in the world!

On November 29th, it is the International Day for Women Human Rights Defenders – this is your day!

We are all here today to honour you.

You -“young women who march at the forefront demanding change” to quote Lena Ag, Secretary-General at Kvinna till Kvinna.

It is an honour to be among you.

Many young women all over the world are being discriminated, victimized, harassed and threatened because of their gender.

Their rights and access to both public space and their own bodies are restricted by family, by social norms of propriety, by religious rules, or by the fear of being sexually harassed.

In the new report “Femdefenders – Young women who tear down barriers” we learn about how young women who work for equality and peace are challenging power structures, and therefore face double risks of being exposed to discrimination, threats and violence. Despite of this, they refuse to give up – they keep on struggling to tear down barriers and work for change.

As these women witness in the report, there are a lot of obstacles that hinder young women from making their voices heard -sexual harassment, threats and hate speech. This is a great loss to our societies, as it reduces our chances of building a democratic, peaceful and sustainable world.

One brave human rights defender is with us here today, one of the Right Livelihood Award laureates: Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera from Uganda. She is awarded the Right Livelihood Award "...for her courage and persistence, despite violence and intimidation, in working for the right of LGBTI people to a life free from prejudice and persecution."

You are indeed an inspiration to all of us.

I will end my short speech here today by quoting some of you, the brave and wise young women featured in the report:

Zarine from Armenia says that “If we go round with our hearts full of hate, how will we ever be able to resolve the conflict?”

Leyla from Azerbaijan says “Very few people see young women as real people, we’re more like slaves to them. ”What can women do?” I’m so tired of that. I can do anything!”

Amanda from Sweden says in the report that her “hands and legs still shake with anger whenever I hear about women human rights not being respected”

Amanda, my hands and legs also shake when the full enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights are being violated.

But when I look at these remarkable young and brave women, I feel optimistic and encouraged.

You are power, hope and future!

Thank you.



Speech from Ministry of Culture, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the panel discussion on complementarity

Published 24 November 2015 Updated 24 November 2015

Session of the Assembly of States Parties, ICC, The Hague, 19 November 2015. Check against delivery.

Part 1: Ensuring access to justice for victims

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen, We are here today to discuss and learn from each other's experiences. Our topic is serious and important: How to address sexual and gender-based violence as crimes of international concern. I am honoured to discuss these matters with such distinguished participants.

When our Government assumed office in October 2014, we declared that we will be a feminist government.

As my colleague, Ms. Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs, has stated, this includes pursuing a feminist foreign policy. This means that we aim to strengthen the rights, representation and resources of all women and girls.

We will do so because gender equality is a goal in itself. But it is also essential for the achievement of our overall objectives, such as peace, security and sustainable development. This is why gender equality and human rights efforts must continue unabated.

Ladies and gentlemen, Let us be clear on the magnitude of the problem. Sexual and gender-based violence is a global structural problem that continues to plague every country on earth. Every country on earth. In my own country, Sweden, women and girls risk being a target of violence in

many spheres of society – in their homes, in the public sphere and in working life.

Sexual and gender-based violence can come in many forms. But if we do not dare to say that every country is plagued by this, we are fooling ourselves.

I believe that the patterns of discrimination underlying these crimes are the same both during peacetime and wartime. However, these crimes appear to be intensified during conflict.

It is a plague that exists in affluence and poverty.

It shows up regardless of culture or geographical location.

It will be found at the heart of wars, and in the most peaceful welfare societies.

At the global level, it is estimated that one out of three women are subjected to violence during her lifetime.

Behind that unacceptable piece of statistics you will find pain and suffering beyond our common imagination.

Our world faces extraordinary challenges in relation to the systematic and widespread use of sexual and gender based violence.

It has been taken to new horrific levels.

Sexual violence is not only condoned, but openly commanded as a strategy and as a method of warfare.

This calls for our attention and action and the main question is urgent: How can we address this problem?

First of all we need to realize that sexual and gender-based violence can indeed be prevented, stopped and prosecuted.

Political commitment is imperative to address both the violence itself and its root causes.

Because in societies where we do not address inequalities between women and men, or where we accept discrimination or negative attitudes or stereotypes, gender-based violence can be the ultimate consequence.

We must therefore take a firm stand and tackle discrimination, in all its forms, as a measure to address the issue at hand.

In 2015 it should go without saying that women's rights are human rights.

Ending sexual and gender-based violence and ensuring justice for victims is an issue of rights.

Survivors are not only victims but also rights holders entitled to justice and reparation, as well as protection and support.

The excellent report of the International Development Law Organization clearly points to the importance of breaking the silence and shame surrounding these crimes.

The stigma that is often attached to victims – both women and men – must be removed.

With silence, shame and stigma comes underreporting which shadows the true extent of the problem. It also prevents authorities from responding adequately.

It is consequently of vital importance to address this issue through strategic action and by raising awareness.

Courageous victims deserve nothing but our full respect and support. The shame belongs elsewhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, It is a major achievement that international criminal law now recognizes the gravity of sexual and gender-based crimes as serious international crimes.

The Statute of the ICC includes various forms of sexual and gender-based crimes such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, and other forms of sexual violence. Let me be clear: These are acts of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The ICC Statute is a part of a broader movement underlining the impact of conflict on women, as well as women's important role in all phases of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and the rebuilding of war torn societies.

UN Security Council resolution 1325 and the subsequent resolutions on

women, peace and security have been crucial. This progress also points to the fact that we need to address violence to enable women's full participation in all areas of decision-making.

We should acknowledge that international crimes often are especially complex.

They are likely to entail specific challenges in terms of investigation and prosecution.

In implementing the responsibility to prosecute the most serious crimes of international concern, states may need to assist each other in overcoming these challenges.

In this work, states are likely to benefit from the knowledge, practices and expertise of international and regional actors. In this regard I would like to highlight the excellent Policy Paper of the ICC Office of the Prosecutor.

It sets a new and more ambitious standard in all work on ending impunity for sexual and gender-based crimes.

This Policy serves as an inspiration and a guide to states. As co-focal points for complementarity, Sweden and Botswana have cooperated with the ICC Office of the Prosecutor.

The idea is to share the knowledge and practices of the Policy, and to facilitate exchange of experiences and practices among states and other actors.

During the summer, Sweden and Botswana facilitated two workshops on strategic action at national level in Guatemala and Uganda.

Both brought together key national stakeholders representing state and non-state justice actors, but also representatives of the ICC, the UN and regional organizations.

The workshops highlighted how joint and coordinated efforts by national authorities can be strengthened with the support of international and regional organizations and actors, including international development cooperation.

The importance of strong and active civil society organizations, not least women's and victims' rights groups, was evident during the workshops.

This is something I want to highlight especially – without a courageous civil society, that dare to address the issues, our challenges would be even greater.

The workshops also showed how the partnerships and networks of these groups can contribute to ensuring effective access to justice for victims.

Many valuable lessons were drawn, but I will not be more specific here and now.

However, you should be looking forward to listening to my co-panellists: Ms Thelma Aldana, Attorney-General of Guatemala, and Mr Mike Chibita, Director of Public Prosecutions of Uganda. They will present the workshops in more detail.

Ladies and gentlemen, The Security Council recently adopted a new Women, Peace and Security resolution (2242). It builds further on the ground breaking resolution 1325.

Let us use this resolution as an opportunity to do better and step up our efforts to advance the rights, representation and resources of women. As a representative of a feminist government, I can assure you that we are fully committed to work even harder and build strong partnerships. The question is to ensure justice for victims of sexual and gender-based crimes.

The answer is to make sure that shame and punishment is due where shame and punishment belong. Thank you.

Part 2 - Enhancing empowerment of victims

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen, We are discussing here today: Ensuring access to justice and the empowerment of victims.

I believe they are mutually reinforcing and interdependent. It is hard to achieve one of them without the other.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the main priorities of our feminist foreign policy is to strengthen women's access to resources.

During 2014, only 35 percent of economic support in post-conflict recovery programs went to women. The rest, needless to say, ended up with the other sex.

To achieve real change, political commitments need to be accompanied by sustainable financing with measures to address root causes of violence.

Sweden vows to continue promoting women's social, political and economic empowerment.

We will continue to counter narratives that reinforce negative gender roles.

And we will also continue to support organizations working to engage men and boys in the pursuit of gender justice.

Recent good practice from conflict-affected countries show the importance of engaging men and boys to prevent sexual and gender-based crimes from being committed in the first place.

Ladies and gentlemen, Sweden applies a broad approach to the empowerment of victims. We try to connect international expertise and practitioners with development cooperation, national justice mechanisms and civil society.

Let me give a few examples of how joining forces can contribute to empowering victims to access justice.

In Guatemala, we are working with partners – including the Attorney General's Office – to strengthen capacity of national investigations and prosecutions of serious sexual and gender-based crimes.

We also provide support to the UNDP transitional justice program, and to Unicef.

We address the empowerment of victims through supporting civil society organizations, including women's rights and victims' organizations.

One example is our support to the work of the civil society organization Kvinna till Kvinna in Iraq and Syria.

Their work is crucial in building networks of women at the grassroots level that drive change bottom-up. In this way, responses to sexual and gender-based violence are strengthened.

Our support to the ICC Trust Fund for Victims amounts to 4 million euro during the last three years. The result is the empowerment of victims of sexual and gender-based crimes in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of

the Congo.

As a main donor to UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, we are supporting victims in a range of different countries worldwide.

Let me take just an example: UN Action has funded the deployment of Women's Protection Advisers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire.

In Côte d'Ivoire, a new national strategy to combat gender-based violence was launched during a UN Action inter-agency mission last year.

The UN Team of Experts has also provided assistance to the Central African Republic to improve investigations of sexual and gender-based crimes.

The panel of judges in Guinea has also been supported by the Team of Experts

This has resulted in indictment for crimes allegedly committed during the events of September 28th in 2009, including sexual violence. Organizations such as Justice Rapid Response should be utilized as a means to strengthen national capacity through the rapid deployment of expertise.

I am pleased that Justice Rapid Response has strengthened its cooperation with UN Women.

Let us also welcome that a separate roster for experts on the investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes has been launched.

Ladies and gentlemen, Sustainable solutions and measures to address root causes of violence are necessary.

As some of you might know, Sweden is committed to allocating 1 percent of our GDI to development cooperation.

Let me also assure that gender equality, as well as women's rights and empowerment, will remain top priorities in our development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

To conclude: If our common commitment is to be taken seriously, we need to make sure that women's voices are being heard.

The needs and realities of women living in conflict and post-conflict

countries must influence our decisions.

We must pledge to continue to work together with international and regional organizations. With states, civil society organizations, and not least with affected women and men themselves.

And our goal will remain the same: To empower women to claim their rights.

Because women's rights are human rights.

Thank you.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the seminar "The Hero Factor Against Extremism"

Published 12 November 2015 Updated 18 November 2015

Stockholm, 11 November 2015. Check against delivery.

Two weeks ago a young man with a sword in his hand walked into the school Kronan in the town of Trollhättan and killed a young boy and another young man in what the police suspect to be an attempt towards these human beings based on the color of their skin.

Violent extremism is a serious problem for democratic societies. When people use and legitimise violence as a political method, terrorism can develop and democracy is then under an urgent threat.

However, extremism does not originate from vacuum, which means that we must tackle the breeding grounds of extremist groups on an early stage.

In august, the Swedish government adopted an action plan with 21 measures in order to make Sweden more resilient and better prepared to prevent violent extremism. The aim of these measures is to improve our knowledge of violent extremism and develop preventive initiatives and methods.

The Swedish government has also presented a new counter-terrorism strategy with a strong focus on prevention.

The link between radicalization and violent extremist actions is complex, but we know that extremism thrives in societies where racism and undemocratic attitudes are wide-spread.

When a person feels that he or she doesn't belong in his or her country or city – when he or she feels marginalized – violent ideologies function as an

engine that give a sense of purpose and belonging to that individual.

Regrettably, many extremist groups are experts at using some young peoples' search for meaning, redemption and revenge to target these individuals with violent and antidemocratic messages via the internet and social media. The extremist groups aim to attract these young people with ideological material such as images, symbols, music and films, by using popular media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

It is therefore crucial that young people have the tools to critically question extremist messages and propaganda, both on the internet and outside. In this respect, I'm very glad that we have the privilege to hear a bit more about how the Swedish Media Council works with improving the media and information literacy of children and young people, at the end of this seminar.

Unfortunately extremist groups sometimes succeed to convince others that using violence and seriously harming or killing human beings is an act of heroism.

Whereas most of us look at Anders Behring Breivik, the brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, and Anton Lundin Pettersson as violators of human rights and criminals, there are others who regard them as heroes. Even if violent extremists generally don't attract widespread support, they are of concern to society as a whole since their violence targets the core of our democratic systems.

This underlines all too well the need for children and young people to be able to see alternative paths in life that form a sharp contrast to the extremists' propaganda.

Children and young people need good role-models to look up to – may they be real or fictive. What unites them is the hero factor – a unique quality to perform extraordinary deeds for the benefit of others. In the Swedish tradition we have heroes such as Bamse, Pippi Longstocking and Lisbeth Salander.

We are very happy to have invited Suleiman Bakhit here today. Suleiman Bakhit is a prevention and heroism expert. His work focuses on terrorism prevention for high risk youth in Jordan, by countering the violent extremists' narratives and mythology.

He will tell us about how heroism can be used as an antidote to extremism.

Welcome on stage, Mr Bakhit.



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at the opening of the Stockholm International Film Festival 2015

Published 11 November 2015 Updated 11 November 2015

Stockholm, 10 October 2015. Check against delivery.

Dear friends,

We all know that very few things can be hidden when we look ourselves in the mirror. The reflection eliminates the picture we had in our head and shows us life just as it is. All the little things we might pretend don't exist, stare us blunt in the face from the mirror. Even though we are not all as bad as she is, it is just like Snowwhite's stepmother; the mirror confronts us with the truth.

This is an image of what Europe is struggling with today; our reflection in the mirror is brutally honest and doesn't show what we expected.

Dear film lovers,

I don't have to convince you of the fact that film as an art form is totally unique. As every other art form it has a fundamental value in itself. But its very strong impact and potential to reach a big audience makes film important also from a democratic perspective. Film can portray the present and past seen from different viewpoints and the audience can be small or large, without really saying anything about the relevance of a film.

I am impressed by the program of the 26th Stockholm International Film Festival. 190 new films from 70 different countries shows that Stockholm can indeed offer a festival of global importance. This also shows the potential of this art form to unite people from different countries and different cultures.

The Stockholm International Film Festival demonstrates courage and fulfils the ambition to be a truly contemporary festival in tune with the times. This is not at least clear from the list of participating guests. This year, Ai Weiwei, one of the most important and influential artists of our time, has accepted to present the Stockholm Impact Award. This is a clear recognition of the respect that this festival enjoys in the artistic world.

The fact that you this year have chosen to put the spotlight on one of the most burning issues of today – migration – also underlines the relevance of this festival. And since the Stockholm festival has activities all year around, what is shown during these intense weeks in November, will resonate during the whole year.

It is my conviction as minister for both culture and democracy that film can give good preconditions to strengthening freedom of speech and thereby help building a stronger democratic society. Consequently, the Swedish government proposes to introduce this as an objective for the new Swedish film policy.

Dear friends,

Europe's reflection in the mirror is not flattering.

In many ways it is an unpleasant picture. The shores of the Mediterranean have shown us destinies of children that waken our despair. Threats, violence, suspicion and fear meet many of those seeking shelter in Europe today.

But the picture also shows an enormous solidarity. People are putting their own needs aside and generously offer their time, means and compassion in their encounter with strangers.

Over the last few months I have repeatedly been overwhelmed by people's commitment and willingness to help. There are many forces of good who really want to turn this very difficult situation into something hopeful. At the same time, the brutality and lack of empathy shown by some, to people in their most vulnerable situations has been shocking.

The reflection in the mirror shows us a Europe not fully able to trust the guiding values that have made us strong. A Europe which hesitates as to whom should be included in our solidarity. And a Europe that falters before the responsibility that the rest of the world expects us to take.

I can understand that. I can see where the fear and anxiety comes from, even though I never will accept its outermost consequences. But I wish that we will see a Europe that will ultimately dare to stand strong and united in facing this challenge.

To help us achieve this, we need to be able to see ourselves in the reflection of others. As an art form, film has exceptional possibilities to offer such reflections.

From the Festival Program it is clear that many important experiences await the audience of the Stockholm Film Festival. I can't think of a more inspiring context than a film festival to discuss life and the world as it is today.

I am very proud to declare the Stockholm International Film Festival of 2015 open.

Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Opening speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke, Sveriges ungdomsråd's national congress

Published 30 October 2015 Updated 30 October 2015

Stockholm, 29 October 2015 Check against delivery.

I'm very glad to see that so many committed young people from all parts of Sweden and from a number of other countries such as Spain, Denmark and Turkey have gathered here in Stockholm for this important conference.

The last few months have been extremely dramatic with tens of thousands of people fleeing from war and terror arriving at our borders, horrifying attacks on asylum accommodations and refugee centres around the country, and most recently the massacre at the primary school "the Crown" in Trollhättan. In this troubled time the work of youth councils in Sweden and in other countries are more important than ever. In particular the task of promoting democracy and the inclusion of all have never been more important.

Some of you come from Stockholm. Some of you come from other parts of Sweden and some of you have travelled here from other countries. Let me ask two questions:

How many of you did pass the Central train station on the way here and noticed all the refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan that seek shelter there? (Please raise your hands)

How many passed by a Roma migrant begging in the street, on your way here? (Please raise your hands)

Even though Sweden is situated in the remote northern outskirts of Europe we have never been isolated from the rest of the world – this we learn from our history. But today it stands clearer than ever that we are part of a global

context that we cannot isolate ourselves from. War and oppression in other parts of the world, leading to millions of people fleeing for their lives results in significant numbers of refugees arriving also to Sweden. The forecast says that somewhere between 140 000 and 190 000 refugees will arrive here only this year.

The many Roma migrants who beg in our streets and the many people fleeing from war and oppression in Syria and neighbouring countries forces us all to take a stand. Who do I want to be as a person? One that turns my back on people in deep need and distress or one that cares and do my best to support and be compassionate. The situation also forces our whole society to choose direction. For the government that I represent this choice is clear. Sweden will be a country that stands up for and provides a safe place for people in need and distress.

Sweden will without doubt face significant challenges receiving and taking care of the many refugees who have arrived recently and who will continue to come. To manage this in a good way, all parts of society have to work together and have important roles to play: the national government, authorities at various levels, the business sector and civil society.

Those who are new in Sweden should not only be provided with housing, income and education. It is also very important that they become part of the civil society and feel part of democracy. Many of those who arrive in Sweden right now are young. Here I think that The Swedish association of Youth Councils and the local youth councils has very good potential to make an important contribution.

I've been talking about Sweden as a part of the global community. The ongoing refugee crisis also shows how important cooperation within the EU is to meet common challenges. I was therefore very pleased when I saw that the theme of this conference is: "YOU and the EU - On European politics".

Finally, I want to thank you for inviting me to hold an opening speech at this conference. The program of the conference looks very exciting, and I am sure that the conference will give all of you lots of energy, knowledge and new ideas to take back to your important work with youth councils all around the country. Democracy needs to be protected and developed, more people need to be involved and we must do this together. All of you that are here today, as well as the rest of civil society in Sweden has an important role to play in this work.



Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech by Alice Bah Kuhnke at Göteborg book fair 2015

Published 24 September 2015 Updated 24 September 2015

Göteborg, 24 september 2015. Check against delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear all,

Last Sunday, I was having breakfast with Predrag Blagojevic in Belgrade. He is a journalist and editor in chief for the newspaper Juzne Vesti. Predrag Blagojevic has devoted his life to stand up for freedom of speech in his home country. For that he has been assaulted, threatened and persecuted. I asked him; how can you bear this life? His answer scared me: “ I don’t know why I do this anymore.”

A book – as a physical item not more than a bunch of paper connected in a spine. But as a concept one of the most precious thing we know. A carrier of knowledge, of ideas, experiences and stories, well worth celebrating. As we do in Gothenburg today.

To me the book - may it be in the form of printed papers, digitalized bits of information of recorded voices - symbolizes knowledge, adventure, fantastic journeys, feelings of joy, passion and sorrow - all the complexity of life. Many times, the simple joy of reading a book is nothing more than a pleasure. Sometimes, when we least expect it, reading a certain book can be a life-changing experience.

Perhaps most of all, a book is one of the strongest symbols of the freedom of expression. The notion that anything can be written or said, no matter how much we dislike it. We don’t have to agree with the authors' political, moral or religious views - but we must at any time protect and safeguard everyone's right to express it. When those in power – anywhere in the world – start to limit freedom of expression, we are all affected and in the end - all on the losing side.

Not so long ago, many of us felt that freedom of speech and democratic values were being strengthened in many countries where this previously had been limited. The path towards more freedom appeared to be assured. But, sadly, in the last few years we have seen the quite opposite development in many parts of the world. Freedom of speech is again being limited, by those who wish to control information and by those who wish to remain in power long after their time. Journalists are imprisoned; authors and artists are threatened to silence. This development is of course extremely worrying – and dangerous. But as always, we can learn something from this; in fact we must learn. We can never take freedom of speech for granted. Freedom of speech has to be defended every day and every hour.

From history we also learn that dictators fear books as much as they fear individuals. Why? Because books collect our memories, they recreate the basis of our cultural identities and they live on when we die. The access to a library is a key to history. The destruction of a library is an efficient way to eliminate people's connection to that history.

In his book “The book thieves”, the Swedish author Anders Rydell gives us the story of how books were confiscated during the Second World War. The aim was to own the culture and history of the enemy, to rewrite history – for the enemy to remain an enemy also for future generations. After many years had passed, as part of his own research, Anders Rydell was able to bring one of the confiscated books back to the granddaughter of the rightful owner. This was a very emotional experience for the woman, since this book was the only belonging she had from her grandfather. This shows that a book can be more valuable than a piece of jewellery. A book is a part of a relation.

A few days ago I came back from the border between Serbia and Croatia. I wanted to see for myself the situation for refugees on the borders of Europe. This is of course an experience that I will never forget. People walking through Europe, having left everything they own and the horrors of war behind. They have nothing left, except memories – and the most recent of these memories are almost unbearable.

I hope that the stories of these people's lives will be told to generations ahead and my innermost wish is that their story will not end at the border of Serbia or Hungary. I wish that my grandchildren will come to learn how Europe, in 2015, jointly took the responsibility for people that needed safety and shelter, and provided them with the freedom and peace of mind that they deserve. Because if there is something that we can learn from the history of Europe and the rest of the world, it is that the destiny of one

people today, can be the destiny of another tomorrow.

Now, I am honoured to leave the floor to a writer and a journalist who, just like Predrag Blagojevic stands up for freedom of speech and has shown us how much one individual can make a difference. Masha Gessen, thank you for your courage, you are an inspiration to all of us.

With this, I declare the Gothenburg Book Fair 2015 – open!

Thank you!



Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech at the ALMA Award ceremony

Published 02 June 2015 Updated 02 June 2015

1 June 2015, Stockholm Concert Hall Check against delivery.

Excellencies, representatives for PRAESA, ladies and gentlemen,

The literature heritage of Astrid Lindgren is very rich. Her stories will play a significant role for children generations ahead and I am sure that her unique way of describing and understanding childhood will inspire authors yet for a very long time. Her legacy is also her very brave and consistent work for children's rights and democracy.

Her most famous character, Pippi Longstocking, made her first public entry exactly 70 years ago, and has since then enriched and in a ground breaking way changed the world of children's literature. Pippi's birthday was celebrated here in Stockholm a few days ago. Pippi, is the strongest girl in the world, who dares to stand up for the the children, speaking her mind whether asked or not. A little girl with absent parents, but with a suitcase full of golden coins that she gives to those who really need them.

Thousands of little boys and girls came to meet the inimitable characters in the story, with freckles on their cheek and braids standing straight out from their small heads. Proud and brave children, just like Astrid Lindgren describes them.

If there is someone who shows that she believes in the capacity of children it is Astrid Lindgren, and she shows that time after time in her books. Always putting the child in the focus of each story. That does not mean she looks upon them as small adults, no, rather the other way around; the qualities of children is missing in adult life.

Today we celebrate the work of PRAESA which is truly conducted in the spirit of Astrid Lindgren. An organization sprung out of the anti-apartheid movement, drawing attention to the necessity of a language to gain personal and social development. Based on research, PRAESA establishes that a strong mother tongue improves the abilities to learn to read. PRAESA also encourages reading for the joy of it.

For me as a minister of both culture and democracy it is very encouraging to see PRAESA's successful work using culture to strengthen democracy. A wide range of culture, arts and literature that reaches both adults and children is a prerequisite for democratic development and for preserving democracy.

Our time is a time when everything we do has to have a purpose, even intangible values such as cultural expressions and experiences. But we have to remind ourselves where it all starts: with passion and pleasure. With no passion or no pleasure, we will never give our children an appetite for reading. An appetite for literature. PRAESA is working from that outset. I truly admire PRAESA's courage for pointing this out, it could easily have been replaced by necessity and measurable reasons that would please every politician in the world.

Dear representatives of PRAESA, I can't think of anything more meaningful than teaching and encouraging a child to read. To teach her each letter, one by one. To slowly make her read the letters together as words. To see the satisfaction in her face when words following each other in a sentence, makes sense. To encourage her to read a book and make her perceive that between every cover of a book hides a story for every child to discover and understand in its own way. Those are small miracles that we all can make happen in our everyday life.

Your work is much bigger than that. The task you have taken on includes giving children brought up in some of the most exposed areas in South Africa access to their own language and to literature. We all need literature; it broadens our minds, it enriches our fantasy, it makes our lives more interesting and it is a true pleasure. But for children brought up in a harsh environment it means something more, the literature becomes a place to escape to, many other worlds to explore. Literature can point out a new direction in life and show possibilities that can be difficult to discover on your own.

The day is not over when it is time to go to bed. Then it is time to read a

book. Another life opens up. The adventure continues, endlessly.

Dear PRAESA, I would like to thank you, on behalf of the Swedish government, for your devoted and professional work to point out these adventures out to the children, and thereby give them joy, courage and love.

Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech at the ISPA Congress 2015

Published 28 May 2015 Updated 28 May 2015

Malmö Live, 27 maj 2015 Check against delivery.

Ladies and Gentlemen, friends of the arts,

Today is a special day because I have been given the opportunity to join you all from ISPA at the new Malmö Live. I feel both proud and honoured. And I would like to thank you and the organisers – Musik i Syd and the Danish Arts Foundation – for enabling us to come together here in Malmö, my home town. I was born here.

I know that the theme of the congress is ‘Building Bridges’. Building bridges is an important task in our society, particularly at present when there are unfortunately many dark forces calling into question the equal value of all people and diversity in our societies. This is an undesirable trend that we must address and combat.

Culture and the performing arts are important parts of our lives. It’s important for us as human beings. Theatre, dance and music accompany us all along our journey through life. From the very moment we are born until we leave our loved ones. The performing arts evoke joy, laughter, tears and insights, and the arts can help us to re-evaluate and think in new ways.

The core of culture is its free, independent and challenging force. Culture – and the performing arts in particular – can help us to come together as people, exchange thoughts and sometimes change opinions; they turn our everyday lives and our societies into places where we can all feel safe and where we dare to, and can, realise our dreams.

As minister in the Swedish government with responsibility for both culture and democracy issues, I am convinced – as is the entire Swedish

Government – that culture is essential to creating a sustainable democratic society where everyone has a place and can be heard and seen. This is what I am working for, both in Sweden and in our relations with the rest of the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The Convention celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Last week, the cultural sector of Sweden drew attention to the need for greater diversity through a special conference attended by UNESCO representatives and Swedish cultural actors.

All of you members of ISPA who are present today make a significant contribution to the positive force that culture exerts on us as individuals and on our societies.

I am certain that during this conference, you will share your experiences and your ideas and be curious about each other's activities. This is how new bridges emerge that provide scope for new artistic expressions, greater accessibility and greater diversity, so that the performing arts retain and strengthen the development capacity that we need in this world.

Finally, I would like to wish you all an interesting few days in the Öresund region.

Thank you.



Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech at the announcement of the 2015 laureate of the ALMA-award

Published 31 March 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

The National Library of Sweden 31 mars 2015 Check against delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, in Stockholm and in Bologna,

To read a book as a child is something different to reading a book as an adult. A child experiences a book in its own way, with a curious mind and an open heart. Children are both demanding and grateful readers. That makes high quality literature for children extraordinary important.

I remember reading the book *Katitzi* by the Swedish author Katarina Taikon as a child. It is a book about a girl that did the same things as I did as a child; she fought with her siblings, she did really good things and she made mistakes, just like any other child. But some parts of her life were profoundly different from mine; she lived in a caravan and her family constantly had to move, she couldn't go to school. But what I remember most was that meeting suspicion and aversion was part of everyday-life for *Katitzi* and her family. *Katitzi* was a Swedish Roma-girl growing up in Sweden in the middle of the 20th century. Today, the experience I got from reading *Katitzi* still lives with me but when I read it today I understand it in a different way. I am glad that I still bear the experience of a young reader with me. Unfortunately the story of *Katitzi* still bear relevance today.

Young readers can be difficult to please. They are not impressed by the name of the author, they don't care if their mother has told them that "this is a very good book". Simply; if they don't like the book they will stop listening or stop reading. Therefore being an author for children and young people is

more difficult than writing books for adults. These authors open new worlds to our children and give them tools to understand and handle the world around them.

Being able to read gives you the opportunity to take part of the democratic society and a whole world of fantastic literature lies ahead of you. Authors of children's books creates an appetite for life!

The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award honours one of the greatest authors of literature for children. Astrid Lindgren leaves no one untouched. She was a brave author with a big heart. During her lifetime she was active in the public debate, constantly standing up for those with a weak, or no voice of their own. Astrid Lindgren was a great author but also a great defender of civil rights, democracy and every child's right to be a child.

Now I am very proud to leave the floor to the president of the ALMA-jury Boel Westin who will present to us today's laureate. Thank you!



Government Offices of Sweden

Speech from Ministry of Culture

Speech at the opening of Göteborg Film Festival

Published 23 January 2015 Updated 17 May 2015

Biograf Draken, Gothenburg 23 januari 2015 Check against delivery.

Good evening,

It feels good to be here and to have the opportunity to speak at the opening of the Göteborg Film Festival, which I have enjoyed in the past as a visitor - like many thousands of other people over the years.

Last summer I had reason to attend another film festival, in Croatia. After a generous reception from volunteer cinema enthusiasts and after checking in at a charming hotel, with drinks and food all around, we sat under the starry skies with bread and wine.

The whole thing was like a scene from a cliché romantic movie, like "Cinema paradiso". A warm summer night, bread, wine and colourful lights, laughter and intense discussions. One of the people who talked the most caught my attention. From a distance, he seemed interesting, inspiring, and yes, he sounded attractive. Close up, he turned out to be an extremely unpleasant person, a nationalist, male chauvinist, racist, homophobe, a self-satisfied damned fool with an ugly soul and - a film director.

Provoked and deeply disappointed, I spat out something about how far too many films lack perspective, about voices that remain unheard, people who remain unseen and who are not given any space. He gave a deep sigh, and with a stealthy look, asked whether what I was asking for was worth it - "at the expense of quality?"

I felt ashamed of myself and of the obvious fact that I had been living in the

naïve belief that 'film people' were consciously out to make the world a better place and that mindless talk about meaningless things was only the province of - politicians & Well, of course this was a few weeks before the Prime Minister had the good taste to phone me.

Fortunately, the successful politician is not the one who has the job of developing Swedish film policy. And fortunately, I'm not just sitting in my office doing that. No, the future of Swedish film policy will be based on the work that you - or at least the many representatives of many parts of the film sector - have done. During autumn, the Ministry of Culture has initiated and facilitated dialogue between authors, producers, distributors, cinema owners, television companies, internet actors and financiers. Swedish film policy must foster an open climate in which the diversity of stories and talents is the greatest asset of films of every type. But how can we get systems that identify all these different 'best projects'?

How sure can we be about our assessments and predictions? How can we ensure that we have robust and well-established production companies that manage - in times of success and setbacks alike - to maintain continuity and quality, while encouraging smaller and perhaps untested actors to participate in development and innovation? Development - both artistic development and the development of business methods and models - is essential for the long-term survival of the Swedish film sector and to ensure that filmgoers can enjoy a broad and high-quality range of films.

We need to continue to work on more technology-neutral forms of support. Media habits have changed dramatically in the past five years and we know that streaming and home cinema systems are increasingly part of people's everyday lives.

As you can tell, this truly is a tapestry of many patterns and many threads, to be woven into something that works, that is sustainable. In this process we have moved into a more intensive phase. Before long, we need to have the new film policy ready.

In the coming days of this festival we will have a chance to sink into our cinema seats and experience films in the company of others - and all around, before and afterwards, the conversations and discussions will go on. Make sure you squeeze into the seminars - that might be where it suddenly happens. We live in a time of great need for something to happen, for lots to happen that will take us away from the darkness that is spreading across Europe and the world. A world with more conflicts and more refugees than ever, more hate crimes and more extreme right-wingers gaining seats in our

parliaments, more of all those things that are the very opposite of what film can express - other perspectives, other customs, other people's lives, other situations.

As Jonas Holmberg earlier said during this festival, the documentary film "Vessel" by Diana Whitten will be screened. It's being screened because it's a good and important film. But it's also being screened as an act of solidarity with the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU) and its magazine Ottar. The attack was an attack on the freedom of expression, an attack on the equal value of all people and an attack on our democracy.

It's far too easy to lose hope in life and the world. But that's not an option. We therefore need to seek strength and protect ourselves by laughing more, crying more, exploring ourselves more to challenges. We need to let our world be turned upside down more often. Quite simply, we need more of the Göteborg Film Festival.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that many of us need to use our various positions and platforms to work to enable film. Film criticism and lively public discussion of all forms of film have an important role to play. Healthy film criticism is one of the essential conditions for developing film as an art form and an understanding of film and the role it plays in society.

In conclusion, one important factor for film is the festivals - not least the Göteborg Film Festival.

I would like to thank all of you who have made it possible for us once again, for the 38th time, to gather here and kick off another festival days!

Now I look forward to enjoying both "Key Mirror House" and the opening short film "Audition"!

Thank you.