

Swedish Statement UNESCO General Conference 36<sup>th</sup> Session 27 October 2011  
– General Policy Debate

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*Check against delivery*

Mr/Ms President of the General Conference,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last time I gave a speech in this building I quoted Isaac Newton, I will take the opportunity again:

***"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."***

Everyday we all stand on the shoulders of giants. These giants are people who have contributed to democracy, sciences and culture.

I hope that we can make wise decisions here, so that future generations can stand on our shoulders and see further than we do!

Mr/Ms President,

Sweden fully concurs with the statement made by Poland on behalf of the European Union. The EU has an obligation to hold the torch of freedom high. The EU must also continue to work for a world fulfilling the noble goals of the United Nations.

I have closely followed the impressive work of the Director-General, Ms. Bokova and Sweden fully supports her work for reform of UNESCO.

We welcome the proposals based on the outcomes of the independent review of UNESCO and we are looking forward to the implementation of them. We are convinced that the reforms will lead to a strengthening of UNESCO and the UN Family.

Sweden also supports Ms. Bokova's commitment to put human rights of girls and women at the core of all her undertakings as the leader of UNESCO.

It is sad but evident that freedom of the press must remain at the top of UNESCO's agenda in the coming years.

Mr/Ms President,

Education is probably the single strongest force for positive change for individuals and nations.

We have seen great developments in many parts of the world, but still there are millions of children not attending school. Sadly most of them are girls. Without increasing the investments in education for girls and women, the Millennium Development Goals will not be met.

The right to education was established as a universal human right in the UN Declaration on Human Rights. There are still countries who deny their citizens, and especially girls and women, this right. That's a shame.

Out of the world's 775 million illiterate adults, two of three are women. Falling short of respecting the right affects not only individuals but also societies.

Let me underline: This is a very bad economic policy. Not investing in education has a high prize. In these times of global economic crisis, it seems obvious that we must realize the full potential of all human resources.

Closing the gap between male and female employment rates would have huge effects on the global economy.

Sweden would like to congratulate UNESCO for its important work for sexual education. With sexual education we can reduce the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV, and decrease the number of unexpected pregnancies.

A pregnancy can seriously affect girl's health and ability to pursue empowerment through education.

Mr/Ms President,

When artists can't work, books are burnt and cultural heritage is destroyed it is a sign of repressive, dark times ahead.

Sweden considers the cultural conventions of UNESCO and other relevant legal instruments as important tools in the organisation's work within the cultural sector.

Mr/Ms President,

This year squares and streets have been the scene for major uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. We have witnessed courageous people who stand up for the realization of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in their countries.

Women have been an important part of these movements. We need to ensure that the future also brings greater empowerment of women.

History teaches us that revolutions might happen fast, but that democracy-building takes time. I am happy to see that UNESCO already has started working in these countries.

Long term support is needed by national authorities, by non-governmental organizations and by UNESCO to ensure reform and progress.

What has happened in many countries in North Africa is a victory for the values on which UNESCO is built. It is the result of people's quest for dignity, justice and freedom.

Mr/Ms President,

Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of a democratic society.

Internet, social media, and mobile phones should continue to play a crucial role as instruments for participation, transparency and engagement in socio-economic, cultural and political development. The same human rights that people have off-line must also be protected on-line.

The test of democracy is the freedom to criticize. We cannot allow the freedom of expression to be undermined. The Swedish Government attaches great importance to this matter, and to the work of UNESCO in this field.

More than 500 journalists have been killed over the last 10 years. The majority of them not reporting from war zones but reporting about corruption and scandals. Most of these murders are never punished. Sweden appreciates Mme Bokova's diligence in condemning such killings.

We must speak up on behalf of those who have had their own voices silenced, like the Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak.

He was arrested with other colleagues in Eritrea on 23 September 2001 for publishing articles critical of the government in the free Eritrean press. Dawit Isaak is imprisoned because he used his right of freedom of speech, a

fundamental freedom, now denied him and for which he personally has paid dearly for 10 long years.

We call for his immediate release.

The Horn of Africa is an area of concern for press freedom. Two Swedish journalists, Martin Schibbye and photographer Johan Persson, have been detained for over three months in Ethiopia.

They were arrested by the Ethiopian authorities in early July after crossing the border from Somalia into Ethiopia. The Swedish Government is working for their freedom.

In September UNESCO organised the first UN inter-agency meeting on safety of journalists and the question of impunity for murder of journalists. International NGO:s also play a tremendously important role in monitoring press freedom.

Remember: killing or imprisoning a journalist doesn't only silence one individual, it silences the voices of thousands.

Mr/Ms President,

Science and research are tools to build a brighter future for us all. New knowledge is needed to face the grand challenges of our time. As the lead UN agency for research, UNESCO has an important role to play. We who have plenty must take our responsibility and invest in education and research globally.

This year it has been 50 years since the Swedish UN Secretary-General Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld's tragic death. We commemorate one of the greatest international civil servants of all time.

Let me conclude with these words from Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld:

***"The UN has not been created to take humanity to heaven but to save it from hell."***

The need for a United Nations based on political legitimacy, on justice, and on human rights is as strong as ever.

Thank you for your attention.