



17 March 2021
UD2021/

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Global Agenda Department
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UNECE Regional Forum on
Sustainable Development 17-18
March 2021

Swedish statement at UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on 18 March 2021

Madam Executive Secretary of the UNECE,

Mr Under-Secretary-General of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues and partners in our beloved region,

Mr. Co-chair, Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share some experiences from Sweden.

Sweden is preparing its second VNR this year.

The first VNR was completed in 2017 and it provided a baseline for our implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Sweden has a favorable starting position. Our peaceful and democratic conditions, our conscious choice to be open to collaboration with others, at home and abroad, and our dynamic business climate have created a strong foundation for sustainable development and welfare.

We have been working towards the 2030 Agenda long before it even existed. This year marks 100 years of women's right to vote in Sweden. And the fight for democracy and gender equality continues every day.

Earlier this week, Statistic Sweden presented its annual progress report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. While we continue to make good progress, we do have considerable challenges in some areas, such as: growing economic and social inequalities; unsustainable consumption and production patterns; and, violence and abuse have not decreased. In fact, we partly see the opposite, bullying among young people is increasing.

In our second VNR, we will, of course, provide a status update on the implementation of the SDGs and highlight some of the major initiatives that have been launched since we last reported to the UN. Perhaps the most significant policy development is the new long-term goal on achieving the 2030 Agenda through policy coherence for sustainable development. This goal was passed in parliament last year and the principle of leaving no one behind is at its core. We believe a whole of government approach is not enough, we want a whole of society approach and we are weaving the SDGs into our national fabric.

In the VNR, we are putting a strong emphasis on learning. We have conducted an online survey and dialogues with youth. The messages from children and youth will be a strong feature throughout our report. I'm very pleased that Sofia Brännström, one of our youth delegates, was given the opportunity to participate in one of the round-tables organised last week. We need to listen to young people and we need to involve them in a meaningful way.

We have also completed a series of peer-learning initiatives with other countries as part of our VNR-process, such as the one with Spain and Colombia on stakeholder engagement that was facilitated by OECD. In addition, we have had ample opportunities for peer-learning during this Forum. Sharing good practices and learning from each other brings purpose and meaning to the regional forum. Thank you UNECE for making this Forum a successful platform for exchange and learning.

We are pleased that Norway and Denmark are also doing VNRs this year. Our Nordic countries continue to be an endless source of inspiration for us and others around the world. Together we are pushing forward for the Nordic region to become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world.

Mr. Co-chair,

We see localizing SDGs as a key for accelerating action and delivery. We are pleased that many Swedish municipalities and regions have taken the SDGs to heart. Four cities – Stockholm, Uppsala, Malmö and Helsingborg – are doing voluntary local reviews in collaboration with us at the national level. We will include their key messages in our national report. Shortly, you will also hear more from Peter Danielsson, the Mayor of Helsingborg.

Preparing a VNR during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenge. The participatory elements of the VNR-process have been particularly hard to fulfil. Virtual meetings simply do not replace the power of face to face meetings. However, we have come to realize that the true value of the VNR-process is not the report itself, but rather the process of stock-taking and accountability. It provides a platform to raise ambition and reaffirm political commitment for the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

More than ever, the ongoing pandemic crisis shows us the significance of fulfilling the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Ensuring sustainable development, addressing the financing gap, mitigating and adapting to climate change as well as safeguarding biodiversity will be vital to improve the resilience of our societies and build back better for both people and planet.

Thank you.