



Stockholm, 1 March 2016

Preventing violent extremism in Sweden through the promotion of human rights and democracy

Human rights, democracy and the threat of violent extremism

Violent extremism is a serious problem for democracy. The violence extremist groups use and legitimises as a political method challenges and threatens democratic society. Despite major ideological differences between these groups, there is one common element that unites them in their rejection of democratic principles and rules, which is a threat to fundamental democratic values. The violence these groups target at individuals because of their political or religious convictions, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity constitutes an attack against the principle of human dignity. This is why it is vital to use our collective powers to defend fundamental democratic values and respect for human rights. This is the most important basis of Sweden's work to reduce the breeding grounds of violent extremism.

Human rights and democratic principles such as those laid down in the Instrument of Government and in international agreements concerning human rights are the fundamental values of Swedish society. On the basis of these principles, a democratic society is created and individuals can unite behind and accept decisions that are made and can take responsibility for one another and the development of the society they share. A democratic society is dependent on everyone respecting each other's rights and solving conflicts in accordance with the rules of democracy. In a democratic society, a diverse range of political ideologies and ideas play an important role in political dialogue. Ideologies can be strong democratic driving forces in work to promote social change. However, some individuals and groups adopt political ideologies that justify antidemocratic methods and legitimise violence as a means of achieving changes in society.

Prevention must be non-discriminatory and legally sound to be effective

Political circumstances, polarisation between groups, armed conflicts and war have an impact on people's readiness to sanction violence as a

means of achieving changes in society. Violent ideologies function as an engine that gives a sense of purpose to individuals and groups and contribute to framing violent acts and a means by which to achieve an overarching ideological aim involving specific societal goals. A democratic society in which human rights are respected is sometimes singled out as an enemy of the particular ideal society envisaged by each violent ideology. Consequently, strengthening and defending a pluralistic, equal and democratic society must be the focus of preventive efforts against violent extremism. This work must be undertaken with respect for fundamental democratic principles such as freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, freedom of association and freedom of religion. Individuals who feel that their fundamental rights are being violated or feel they have been singled out as a result of their political opinions, their religious convictions or their ethnicity can lose their faith in democracy. If prevention is to be successful, it must be, and be perceived to be, non-discriminatory and legally sound.

Examples of the Swedish Government's efforts to reinforce and safeguard democracy and the open pluralistic society in order to prevent violent extremism:

The National Coordinator to safeguard democracy against violent extremism is the most far-reaching initiative currently underway to develop the efforts to prevent violent extremism in Sweden. The National Coordinator's main task is to develop and reinforce the work taking place at local level and ensure that there is cooperation between government authorities, municipalities, and civil society organisations. The Swedish Government has tasked The Living History Forum, a Swedish public authority, with implementing a major educational initiative about different forms of historical and contemporary racism and intolerance. The aim of this action is to contribute to the creation of an equal society characterised by respect for the dignity and human rights of all and to promote democracy.

The Swedish Government has also commissioned the Swedish Media Council to develop the campaign No Hate Speech Movement so that it also includes initiatives to safeguard democracy against violent extremism by improving the media and information literacy of children and young people. The campaign is to be specifically focused on improving the ability of children and young people to use their freedom of expression and to respect human rights, increasing participation in democracy and stimulating criticism of sources and the independent critical appraisal of what appears in the media. The aim of this

assignment is to prevent racism, sexism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and to safeguard democracy against violent extremism.

The Swedish Government has also tasked the Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities (SST) with broadening and deepening the dialogue with faith communities, with the aim of stimulating their work with democracy and democratic awareness. The Commission is to develop this dialogue to include a broad spectrum of communities and groups within these communities, with a specific focus on women and young people.

The Swedish Government has tasked the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) with allocating central government funding to organisations and municipalities for activities that counteract antidemocratic behaviour and radicalisation and links to violent extremism.