

From Lund to Ljubljana: Promoting the participation of national minorities as a pathway to the integration of diverse societies.

Lund 14th November 2019

Remarks by Ambassador Annika Ben David in opening panel:

High Commissioner Zannier

Former High Commissioner Ekéus

Representatives of the OSCE Chairmanship in Office

Your Excellency President Tarja Halonen,

Distinguished guests and participants,

1. It is an honor for me as well as the Swedish Government to support the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life* here today.
2. We warmly welcome the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, and thank him and his office for all the work going into this conference and for his tireless efforts to strengthen National Minorities' rights, including of course following up on the Lund recommendations. We especially appreciate the work being done in promoting political participation of national minorities at all levels of society across the OSCE region. This has beyond all doubt contributed to conflict prevention which is at the core of the HCNM's mandate.
3. It was here, in Lund in 1999, that Sweden had the honor of hosting the meeting where the Lund recommendations were first presented, and I am pleased to say that the commitment of the Swedish government remains strong which is seen not least in legislation and policies which continue to be developed to ensure Minorities' participation in decision making.
4. In this context, it is also with great pleasure that we welcome the presence here today of the former High Commissioner of National Minorities, Mr Rolf Ekéus who over his distinguished career has been a champion of Minorities' rights. I take this opportunity to quote him in saying that "the great value of the Lund recommendations lies in the fact that they bring together a wide range of forms

of effective participation with potential applicability to national minorities in diversified domestic frameworks.”

5. As 20 years have passed since the adoption of the recommendations, we would all have wished that we could stand here today to say that they are no longer needed as the rights of National Minorities should today be universally guaranteed. However, as you all know this is not the case. In Sweden, as well as in many parts of the OSCE area, rights of National Minorities need our constant attention as forces wanting to undermine progress seem to be gaining strength.
6. Moreover, we would like to highlight the importance of taking a gender-sensitive approach as it is a fact that women belonging to national minorities can be exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. As High Commissioner Zannier has pointed out before, this is a fundamental prerequisite for social cohesion and conflict prevention.
7. The Swedish Government continues to work actively to empower national minorities, including women, based on UN and Council of Europe conventions as well as OSCE recommendations. We are happy to be able to say that we have taken many important steps over the past decade at both legislative and operational levels. Among many examples the Lund recommendations play an important role in ensuring minorities’ participation in decision making.
8. In Sweden we have five recognized national Minorities, the Jews, Roma, Sami, Swedish Finns and the Tornedalers. Recognising the need to safeguard the rights of these groups Sweden has a National Minorities and Minority Languages Act which was adopted in 2010 and revised in January this year. The law stipulates Minorities’ right to information, protection of culture and language as well as the right to participation and influence, which indeed is very much in line with the Lund recommendations. Having said all this, we are fully aware that many challenges remain and it is only through continued hard work in partnership with minority groups that lasting progress can be made. This is why the meeting here today is so important, to share experiences and discuss what more needs to be done in Sweden as well as in the broader OSCE area.
9. Having said all this however, we are very concerned about the growing intolerance and an increase in hate crimes against national minorities wherever they occur. In Sweden the Swedish government is working diligently to counter this, both of course through ensuring that crimes are met with the full force of the

law, but maybe even more importantly also through our education system to build understanding that will reduce intolerance in the future. Furthermore, my Prime Minister also sees a strong need to strengthen the public knowledge about these issues and is personally leading the initiative to organize the International Holocaust Remembrance Conference which will take place in Malmö next year.

10. I am fully aware that this room is full of experts on the rights of minorities and how to strengthen their participation in public life, including the distinguished experts on this panel. We are all eagerly awaiting to hear their contributions. So with these few words, allow me to express the wishes from my Government for continued excellent co-operation with the High Commissioner and his excellent team and wish them every success, including of course a very successful conference here today. And as always, we stress our unwavering support and strong appreciation for all the autonomous institutions of the OSCE.