



### Message from the Ambassador

2024 has been described as a momentous year for elections and democracy. Over 60 countries, representing nearly half the world's population, are holding elections. Yet despite a potentially record number of people going to the polls, these elections are taking place against a backdrop of global democratic decline, which has an enormous impact on human rights. Global freedom declined for the 17th consecutive year in 2023. Numerous elected governments are undermining fundamental principles of democracy, including freedom of the press, the independence of institutions such as the judiciary, and the ability of opposition parties to compete fairly against the ruling establishment.

We continue our commitment to strengthening the principles of democracy. That can be done during "Fika-breaks," which are pleasant moments for social interaction and creativity. Sweden ranks as one of the most competitive countries in the world, with top grades for innovation, sustainability, equality, happiness, and well-being. So don't underestimate the importance of a "Fika-break." *Hakan Juholt*

### A QUICK READ DURING FIKA

### STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS



The State of the Nation Address (SONA) marks the opening of parliament. SONA provides more than a snapshot of current affairs; it is an opportunity to glimpse into the future and understand the direction that South Africa will take in the coming year.

For us, SONA opens doors to dynamic conversations with our partners in government, civil society, and business. In previous years, we've taken full advantage of this platform to foster meaningful discussions and collaborations. This year, we teamed up with our Nordic partners to co-host a series of events, amplifying the scope and depth of our engagements.



In partnership with the Embassy of Norway, we organised an insightful seminar titled "Reconciliation in South Africa: Lessons on Peace and Conflict Resolution." Delving into the rich legacies of South Africa's four Nobel Peace Prize laureates, we explored strategies for achieving enduring peace and reconciliation amidst rising tensions and conflicts.



During SONA, we met with the deputy minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Alvin Botes, along with our Nordic counterparts. Our discussion was productive, focusing on foreign policy priorities and enhancing cooperation between the Nordics and South Africa. The Nordics were among the earliest supporters of the anti-apartheid movement, and our current collaborations are a testament to that enduring solidarity. While our talks were essential, we also found time to immerse ourselves in the excitement of the African Cup of Nations, cheering on Bafana Bafana as they made their way to the finals.

## MINING INDABA

In early February, we attended the Mining Indaba in Cape Town. This flagship event draws together key players across the African mining value chain. Our Ambassador for Sustainable Business, Cecilia Ekholm, was present. This year's theme centred on embracing positive disruption to propel Africa's mining industry forward. Teaming up with our counterparts from the European Union, we were there to identify potential collaborations that could foster innovation and sustainable development within the sector.



Continuing our collaboration with Nordic partners, we co-hosted the Nordic Sustainable Mining Business Breakfast. This event aimed to facilitate dialogue and share Nordic insights on environmentally friendly mining practices, paving the way for a more sustainable future in the mining industry.



## NAMIBIAN STANDARDS INSTITUTION

In late February, we journeyed to Namibia to attend the concluding event of the European Union-Twinning Project, "Support to the Namibian Standards Institution." Launched in 2022, this initiative aimed to foster economic development and enhance trade by aiding the Namibian Standards Institute in fulfilling its objectives. Sweden's involvement in the project included assisting our Namibian counterparts in addressing technical trade barriers, standardisation, and accreditation. This collaboration enabled Swedish entities such as the Swedish Board for Accreditation and Conformity Assessment, the Swedish Institute for Standards, and the National Board of Trade Sweden to actively participate and contribute to enhancing Namibia's trade and economic prosperity.



## ALTERNATIVE MINING INDABA



Running concurrently with the Mining Indaba, the Alternative Mining Indaba promotes inclusive dialogues and advocates for a feminist future in mining. This year's theme centred on expediting the green transition for mining communities amidst the climate crisis.

Sweden is the first to participate in both Indabas. Many of our civil society partners, supported by Swedish development cooperation, attended the Alternative Indaba to offer insights and share knowledge that empowers communities to understand and equitably navigate the green transition.

Our Ambassador for Sustainable Business, Cecilia Ekholm, attended both Indabas. The Ambassador emphasised that Sweden's involvement in both Indabas "...underscores our commitment, as a mining nation, to prioritise sustainable and responsible mining."



## SWEDEN IN SADC

Amidst much anticipation, Ambassador Håkan Juholt officially presented his credentials to H.E. Magosi, the Secretariat for the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This signifies the Secretariat's formal recognition of Ambassador Juholt as Sweden's representative. With this recognition, Ambassador Juholt is poised to further strengthen collaboration and uphold the enduring relationship that Sweden has cultivated with the SADC.

Following the formalities, the Ambassador and the Secretariat discussed key areas of mutual interest between Sweden and the SADC. These topics included democracy, human rights, trade, and the enhancement of regional cooperation.



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## CAPE TOWN PRIDE



In February, the Embassy returned to Cape Town for the annual Cape Town Pride festivities. Joined by friends and family, we proudly marched beneath the rainbow flag, lending our voices to support the LGBT community in South Africa and beyond.

This year, in collaboration with Cape Town Pride and the Swedish Institute, we hosted a film screening featuring "Prejudice and Pride." This captivating documentary offers a kaleidoscopic journey through queer culture, showcasing a range of Swedish films dating back to 1916. From Mauritz Stiller's groundbreaking portrayal of the world's first gay romance a century ago to the vibrant contemporary landscape of Scandinavian transgender cinema. The film serves as a poignant reminder of the LGBT community's resilience and ongoing struggles through the power of culture and the arts.

The Embassy extended its support to the Cape Town Pride festivities by providing t-shirts for the marshals, volunteers, and organisers who participated in the Mardi Gras Parade. Joining hundreds of marchers, we celebrated the triumphs of the LGBT community.

The Embassy's involvement extended to the Mardi Gras festivities at the Green Point Track, where attendees revelled in a day brimming with music, drinks, delectable food, and bustling markets. Deputy Head of Mission Christian Fogelström delivered a heartfelt message of encouragement and solidarity for the LGBT community. He underscored Sweden's unwavering support for LGBT rights, emphasising their status as fundamental human rights that must be defended globally.

At our booth this year, the Embassy proudly presented an exhibition titled "Sweden A-Z." The exhibition featured 29 captivating images, each corresponding to a letter in the Swedish alphabet, providing a glimpse into various facets of life in Sweden. Alongside celebrating Swedish culture, we reiterated our dedication to the LGBT community. Amidst animated conversations and shared laughter, we offered a cool respite from the blazing sun with shade and refreshing water, ensuring everyone felt welcomed and embraced.



## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

In early March, the Embassy commemorated International Women's Day. This globally recognised occasion underscores the imperative of achieving gender equality and advancing women's well-being across all spheres of life. This year, we adopted a distinctive approach by inviting four young aspiring diplomats to shadow Ambassador Juholt for the day. These individuals were selected for their steadfast commitment to advancing change in gender equality, democracy, and human rights.

The day was brimming with enriching experiences for our young Ambassadors. It began with their participation in a summit centred on addressing gender-based violence, where they had the privilege of listening to a keynote address delivered by the Minister of Social Development, Lindiwe Zulu. From there, they visited Business Sweden to gain insights into the intersection of gender and business. The day concluded with an engaging session where they had the opportunity to interact with accomplished women across various fields of diplomacy, including defence, education, culture, and development cooperation. Through these interactions, they received invaluable mentorship and found inspiration for their future endeavours.



By participating in Ambassador for a Day, the Embassy reaffirms its dedication to emphasising the importance of overcoming bias to achieve a gender-equal world. All too often, girls and young women are discouraged from pursuing certain professions or sectors, being told that they do not belong. This ingrained bias limits their opportunities and stifles their potential. However, it's essential to recognise that the representation of women in decision-making processes directly impacts their ability to influence and shape society.

By offering girls the opportunity to encounter the world of diplomacy, the Embassy is contributing to breaking gender bias. As policies and action plans aiming to tackle gender equality are made within the halls of embassies, international government organisations and agencies, girls should be equipped with opportunities that allow them to determine how they can take up space in the world of diplomacy.



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## PREVENTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender equality is a core value in Sweden's foreign policy. Development assistance has been a tool that we have used to protect and advance gender equality. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains the most severe and widespread violation, hindering women and girls from fully enjoying their fundamental freedoms and realising their potential.

The Embassy co-hosted a regional conference, "Advancing Data and Evidence for Gender-Based Violence Prevention in the Southern African Region". The conference brought together policymakers, researchers, practitioners and civil society organisations working in GBV prevention to share best practices in using data and evidence for GBV prevention. With a keynote address from Lindiwe Zulu, Minister of Social Development, the conference offered an innovative platform to discuss how best to harness data-driven strategies for preventing GBV.



## INTERNATIONAL IDEA BRIEFING

2024 will be a watershed moment for democracy. In collaboration with the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), we hosted a briefing on "Digital Risks to Elections in 2024."

Alberto Fernandez delivered the briefing. The session shed light on the looming threat of disinformation, which severely challenges the integrity of democratic processes. Alberto likened disinformation to pollution, aiming to corrupt our information ecosystem, particularly during crucial and sensitive events like elections.

With support from Sweden, International IDEA is working to protect democracy and the integrity of elections by supporting electoral commissions across the continent.



## SISGP SCHOLARSHIP



Sweden remains dedicated to collaborating with young South Africans and offering opportunities to unlock their potential. Through the Swedish Institute, we provide fully-funded scholarships for South Africans pursuing master's degrees in Sweden. The Swedish Institute Scholarship for Global Professionals (SISGP) is tailored for individuals from South Africa who aspire to lead and contribute to achieving the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Nolwazi Ntini, a recipient of the 2024/24 scholarship, is currently pursuing a master's degree in Social Scientific Data at Lund University. For Nolwazi, this scholarship has been transformative, opening doors to a plethora of opportunities. She encourages others to apply, emphasising how it enables individuals to "...build a community and collaborate for impactful change."

## NOBEL SYMPOSIUM



In March, Ambassador Juholt participated in the Nobel Symposium hosted by the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) in Cape Town. This edition of the Nobel Symposium, focusing on the Economic Sciences and the Microeconomics of Development, follows the tradition of addressing each category of the Nobel Prizes.

Gathering experts and academics, including 2019 laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Ester Duflo, the symposium served as a platform to exchange knowledge on micro-development in various areas such as poverty reduction, health, climate, gender, trade, and policy.

Ambassador Juholt shared his insights into the significance of the Nobel Symposia and STIAS as platforms for collaboration that facilitate the creation of solutions to global challenges.

## SIGEP PROGRAMME

The launch of the Swedish Institute Global Executive Programme (SIGEP) represents a significant stride in expanding opportunities for South Africans to realise their potential. Designed for forward-thinking business leaders, SIGEP aims to drive positive change within companies while addressing societal challenges. Sweden's longstanding commitment to sustainability and enhancing quality of life has fueled innovation, making it an ideal source of inspiration for this program.

SIGEP presents an exceptional opportunity for emerging leaders to learn from Sweden's leading experts and successful sustainability initiatives. With a global perspective, the program will bring together 100 leaders from 22 countries to explore how sustainability can be seamlessly integrated into business practices.

Recruitment for the 2024 cohort is underway, with the announcement of the first group of South African participants expected in late April. From May to November, selected individuals will engage in online and in-person sessions, interacting with top-tier representatives from Swedish companies. Stay updated as we unveil the successful candidates in the upcoming issue.

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## NEWS FROM BUSINESS SWEDEN

Business Sweden is delighted to announce Sara Radu's appointment as the new Country Manager in South Africa. Sara commenced her role with the team in March and looks forward to the exciting journey ahead.

With over 18 years of international experience in leadership and consulting, Sara brings a wealth of expertise to her new position. Her background encompasses various fields, including sales, marketing, manufacturing, procurement, and risk management, cultivated across multiple continents. Notably, Sara served as Polarium's vice president of Africa before joining Business Sweden.

Vice President of Business Sweden, Maha Bouzeid, expressed confidence in Sara's capabilities and commended her impressive track record and ability "...to blend curiosity, result orientation, and courage in a unique manner." From us at the Embassy, we look forward to witnessing the great success that Business Sweden will achieve under Sara's leadership.



## IJR BRIEFING



Since 2003, the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) has conducted the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Survey, a unique endeavour in the country. Over the past two decades, this survey has been instrumental in gauging public sentiment regarding national reconciliation, social cohesion, transformation, and democratic governance. Serving as an invaluable resource, it has been widely utilised by civil society, government, and academia alike.

In 2023, the IJR presented its latest survey, conducted with support from Sweden. It provided insights into long-standing trends and emerging dynamics influencing South African perspectives on their democratic institutions and leaders. With the impending election on the horizon, IJR has scrutinised these indicators to forecast voter behaviour, shedding light on potential voter turnout and preferences. IJR recently joined us to present the SARB survey, which sparked a vibrant exchange among attendees, including representatives from the media, activists, academia, government entities, and political parties.

## LETSEMA PROJECT



In March, we travelled to the mountainous Kingdom of Lesotho to attend the launch of the Low-Carbon Economy Transformation through Sustainable Modernisation and Access (LETSEMA) project. Spearheaded by universities in Lesotho, Finland and Sweden, the project aims to revolutionise the renewable energy sector. By offering higher education and vocational training opportunities in Lesotho, the initiative will empower the next generation of experts in sustainable energy.

Funded by Erasmus Plus, LETSEMA is poised to mitigate the risks posed by climate change and contribute towards job growth by stimulating employment within the sustainable energy sector. As noted by our Economic Counsellor, Martin Jörnruud, LETSEMA embodies "...proactive measures that safeguard the environment while addressing present needs without compromising those of future generations.

## EUROPEAN UNION ELECTIONS

Elections to the European Parliament will be held on 9 June 2024. The Embassy is preparing to facilitate voting for Swedes who wish to vote abroad. Voting can be done by post or in person. Postal votes can be sent in from 25 April 2025. Additionally, advanced voting is available from 16 May 2024. The Embassy of Finland in Pretoria and the honorary consulates in Cape Town, Gaborone and Windhoek will organise election receptions.

Who is eligible to vote for the European Parliament?

- 18 years of age by election day.
- Swedish citizen and is or has been registered in Sweden.
- Citizens of one of the EU member states registered in Sweden and on the electoral roll 30 days before election day.

Voting will also take place at our Embassy in Pretoria on the following dates and times:

- Monday, 27 May at 15H00-18H00
- Tuesday, 28 May at 09H00-12H00

Visit Sweden Abroad to stay updated about voting dates and times at our consulate in Cape Town.



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