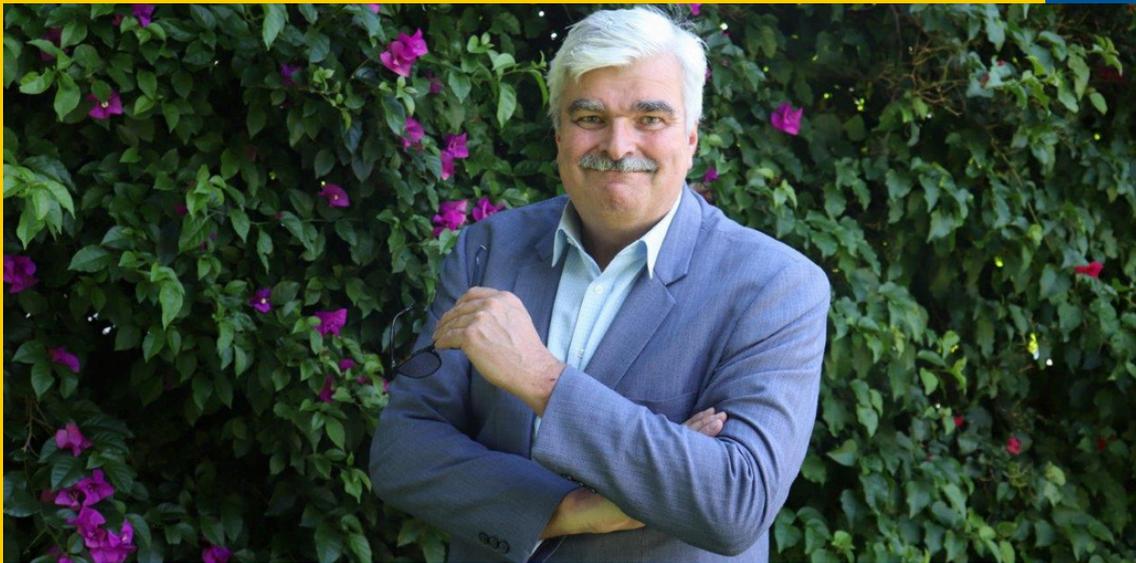


JUNE 2024



### *A Message from the Ambassador*

On May 29, South Africans went to the polls in what has been described as a pivotal year for democracy. Seeing many South Africans standing patiently and fervently in long queues was inspiring. Despite the wait, there was a palpable sense of joy and pride among the voters, a testament to the significance of their participation in the democratic process.

Fewer than a fifth of the world's population lives in free countries. This is part of a broader trend of democratic decline and rising authoritarianism globally over the past two decades. In the face of this, Sweden and South Africa stand united, championing the cause of democracy and supporting those worldwide who are deprived of the human freedoms and rights we cherish. In this newsletter, we want to share some of the issues, projects, and collaborations that are important to us. We invite you to take a break and enjoy a moment of reading, perhaps during a coffee break or, as we say in Sweden, "Fika", and delve into these critical topics.

*Hakan Juholt*

## A QUICK READ DURING FIKA

### STATE SECRETARY KNUTSSON'S VISIT



This visit focused on peace and security, and Secretary Knutsson actively engaged with his counterpart, Deputy Minister Alvin Botes. During their discussions, Secretary Knutsson and Minister Botes reflected on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and regional security challenges.

Other notable leaders he met with include former President Kgalema Motlanthe and various partners in South African civil society and academic institutions.

In March, the Embassy was a hive of excitement as we welcomed a high-level delegation led by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Jan Knutsson. This visit celebrated the enduring friendship between Sweden and South Africa, a bond that traces its origins back to the anti-apartheid movement.

Our bilateral cooperation has grown stronger over the years, notably with the establishment of the Bi-National Commission in 1999. The commission serves as a vital platform for ongoing dialogue and collaboration on global challenges and bilateral commitments and enables us to ensure that our friendship remains grounded in shared values.



### YOUTH IN DEMOCRACY



With national elections on the horizon, we partnered with the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) to host consultations focused on democracy and civil society, explicitly engaging young people. Over two days, youth from across and beyond South Africa came together to tackle a pressing question: Does Democracy Work? The consensus from these dynamic consultations was clear: young people believe in democracy. They are passionate about protecting and promoting it. Their insights and enthusiasm painted a hopeful future where democracy thrives through its youngest citizens' active involvement and commitment.

## PIONEERING GLOBAL COLLABORATION

The South Africa- Sweden University Forum (SASUF) stands as a beacon of international collaboration, uniting forty universities in South Africa and Sweden. Leading researchers, teachers, students and university leaders collaborate in SASUF to develop solutions to achieve sustainable development and accelerate innovation in Africa. This May, SASUF hosted its annual Research and Innovation Week in Sweden—the first of its kind hosted in Sweden with a focus on sustainability.

South African participants travelled to Sweden for a week, where meetings were held among vice-chancellors at Stockholm University, keynote addresses were given on sustainability in higher education, and engaging presentations on ongoing collaborative research were held. Over 400 SASUF members gathered over five days, delving into the transformative power of sustainable redistribution of knowledge, resources, and skills that will significantly contribute to Africa's sustainable development. SASUF sets a wonderful example of this can be done through research and financial support.



## EMPOWERING YOUNG MOTHERS

In Limpopo, Poeletso Mahloko is making a remarkable impact as a peer mentor, guiding adolescents and young mothers through the challenges of parenthood. These young mothers are often vulnerable to poverty, high school dropout, HIV/AIDS, and low partner support. Poeletso's dedication helps them navigate these obstacles, providing friendship and advice in times of need.

Through Poeletso and her peers' efforts, they are encouraging young mothers to not only test for HIV but also begin treatment when necessary. In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV incidence among adolescent girls and young women remains significantly higher than among their male counterparts. These initiatives are crucial in reversing these trends and saving lives.



Sweden's support for the 2gether4SRHR programme fuels Poeletso's work in Limpopo. Our commitment ensures that everyone has equal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) support and services. Implemented by UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO, this programme aims to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people, with a particular focus on adolescents and young people. Through this collaboration, we are helping to create a healthier, more equitable future for young mothers and their children, supporting them to thrive.

## NTLO E ETSAMAYANG: HELEN SEBIDI



In 1991, Mmgakabo Helen Sebidi travelled to Sweden to participate in an artist residency. The trip occurred during a pivotal moment for South Africa, a nation on the brink of profound change and healing. Mmgakabo aimed to showcase her visions of a new South Africa through her art. However, upon her return, she left behind twenty-eight pieces of artwork, which tragically went missing.

Over three decades, Mmgakabo, alongside friends in South Africa and Sweden, searched for the artwork. Their relentless search ended a year ago when the artwork was discovered at the Nyköping's Folkhögskola, a vocational school in southern Sweden. In December 2023, the artwork was joyfully returned to Mmgakabo.

This April, we were privileged to partner with the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Everard Read Gallery to present an exhibition of the recovered artwork. The exhibition, *Ntlo E Etsamayang (The Walking House)* celebrates not only the artwork's recovery but also Mmgakabo's remarkable artistic journey and her unwavering commitment to indigenous knowledge systems. Through these collaborations, we are using art as tool to promote co-operation between South Africa and Sweden and enriching knowledge of each other's cultures.

## CELEBRATING DIVERSITY AND ADVOCACY

On June 17th, the world unites to celebrate the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOT). This year, we were thrilled to collaborate with the European Union and Flanders delegation, and civil society organisations such as Iranti and Beyond the Margins to host a documentary screening. These films vividly portray the lived experiences of intersex, transgender, and queer individuals and their families. The event, themed "Victories, Challenges, and the Role of Activism," provided a profound reflection on the contributions of art to achieving equality and freedom.

The event also celebrated the adoption of a historical resolution in the United Nations Human Rights Council. Sweden supported Finland and South Africa as key drafters of the resolution. This resolution calls on states to combat harmful and violent practices against intersex people and to address the root causes of these practices by addressing stigma, taboos and misinformation.

Sweden remains steadfast in its commitment to the LGBTIQ community. Through the Global Equity Fund, we support the LGBTIQ movement to advocate for itself. Our efforts extend across Africa, ensuring equal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for the LGBTIQ community. These commitments underscore a powerful message: everyone is born free and equal, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender expression.



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## BUSINESS SWEDEN

Nearly a year ago, Business Sweden inaugurated its new office. The move from Fourways to bustling Sandton cemented Business Sweden's presence in Southern Africa and symbolised its commitment to exploring the vast opportunities within the dynamic South African market. The new Sandton office, located in Africa's most expensive square mile, is fast becoming a premier resource for Swedish companies operating in South Africa.

Business Sweden, The Swedish Trade and Investment Council is offering comprehensive Business Incubation and Operation (BI&O) services. These services provide companies with essential support and facilities to accelerate their expansion in the Southern African region. Beyond helping Swedish companies establish themselves, the BI&O services also assist with local staffing, offering co-working spaces and conference rooms.

By joining the BI&O network, companies can become part of a growing Swedish business community, receive expert guidance in navigating unfamiliar market environments, and optimise their business resources. Moreover, they can ensure compliance with local and common labour practices. Embrace the opportunity to thrive in Southern Africa with Business Sweden's robust support and premier facilities.



## STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA

Crunching numbers and advancing development have been at the heart of Statistics South Africa. In April, we gathered Statistics South Africa and its counterparts in Kenya and Sweden to exchange knowledge and experiences on producing timely, accurate, and official statistics. Statistics South Africa has become a model within Africa, inspiring others to adopt a culture of quality.

While Sweden's formal collaboration with Statistics South Africa ended in 2014, with the conclusion of our bilateral development cooperation strategy, our shared belief in the importance of trustworthy statistics remains steadfast. Working within the continent, with peers in Kenya and South Africa, we remain committed to advancing economic development rooted in evidence-based analysis and data to inform sound policies and foster progress across the continent.



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## TETRA PAK FACTORY OPENING



Open any fridge or cupboard in a home, and you will likely find that many of your favourite brands are packaged by Tetra Pak®. This Swedish brand has been at the forefront of food processing and packaging solutions for over seventy years.

In April, we had the privilege of travelling with Ambassador Juholt and President Ramaphosa to Durban for a significant milestone: the reopening of Tetra Pak's plant in Pinetown. Following a substantial investment of R500 million, the upgraded facilities, which took two years to complete, will expand the plant's production capacity. The upgrades enable Tetra Pak® to extend its services and offerings to more customers across the Southern African region.

Like other Swedish businesses in South Africa, Tetra Pak® is making significant investments to rebuild the manufacturing sector, create jobs, and strengthen the country's economic competitiveness. Promoting local sourcing and production efforts is vital in driving economic growth.



## SADC PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

In December of last year, the regional Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) team entered into a significant collaborative agreement with the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF). Valued at 4.9 million USD, the agreement aims to promote SRHR and HIV/AIDS-related services across the region. This partnership builds on successful collaborations between Sweden, SADC PF, and affiliated national parliaments.

Recently, we had the opportunity to catch up with SADC PF's financial team to review our achievements. The conversations were both enlightening, focusing on the sustainability of SRHR funding. Together, we are committed to enhancing the quality and accessibility of SRHR and HIV/AIDS services, ensuring a healthier and more equitable future for the region.



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## WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

# World Press Freedom Day

On May 3, 2024, the world commemorates World Press Freedom Day, with UNESCO spearheading a campaign emphasising journalism's crucial role in addressing the global climate crisis. Journalists stand on the front lines, documenting the profound impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable communities. Their stories of turmoil, loss, and displacement are vital, raising awareness and shaping climate action.

This year, Ambassador Juholt contributed an inspiring op-ed to the Daily Maverick. As a veteran journalist, Juholt pays tribute to those who have fought and continue to fight for our democratic right to be informed, enabling us to make decisions for a just and green transition. However, he also sounds an alarm: the climate crisis poses a new threat to press freedom, one that could undermine both journalists and democracy itself. The spread of misinformation and disinformation about ecological issues erodes public trust and diminishes political support for necessary climate action.

Read the entire op-ed piece on the [Daily Maverick](#) site.

## STRENGTHENING SRHR WITH REPSSI

In April, we embarked on an inspiring trip to Diepslot, Johannesburg, where we reunited with our valued partners, the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI). With Sweden's steadfast support, REPSSI is making remarkable strides in ensuring that young girls and boys across Southern Africa have access to vital sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services.

Our collaboration with REPSSI extends beyond Diepslot to include communities in Soweto and Orange Farm, with a shared goal of ensuring that SRHR is inclusive and accessible to all. Together, we are breaking down barriers to access and providing essential information and mental health support to young people. Our approach focuses on equipping them with the skills they need to boost self-esteem and empowering them to confidently advocate for themselves when accessing SRHR services. Through these efforts, young people will exercise agency over their bodies and lead healthy, fulfilling lives.



## STORIES FROM SWEDEN

The Swedish Institute (SI) offers fully-funded master's scholarships for South Africans driven by a passion for sustainability. One such recipient, Praneet, will soon graduate with a master's in Integrated Product Design from KTH Royal Institute of Technology. In late May, Praneet will address SI scholars from around the world at the Diplomacy Ceremony in Stockholm.

Sweden's renowned commitment to sustainability and innovation has profoundly shaped Praneet's academic and professional journey. His time in Sweden has instilled in him a deep understanding of the importance of sustainability. After graduation, he aspires to contribute to the development of sustainable industrialisation and innovation in South Africa.



## CELEBRATING EU DAY



Europe Day, celebrated on May 9, commemorates the signing of the Schuman Declaration in 1950, which laid the foundation for the European Union (EU). The EU has served as a blueprint for regional integration for seventy years. This year, we marked the occasion with a culinary feast, savouring national dishes and treats with friends from across and beyond Europe.

Sweden joined the EU in 1995, and we added a special touch to the celebrations. Guests were invited to partake in the cherished tradition of fika, which perfectly reflects the values that unite us and the spirit of togetherness that Europe Day celebrates.

## VUSI MAHLASELA

Vusi Mahlasela, famously known as "The Voice" of South Africa, embarked on tours in Sweden for several years during the terrible days of apartheid. Through his music, he carried the powerful message of South Africa's struggle for freedom and democracy. One memorable stop on his tour was in Ambassador Juholt's hometown of Oskarshamn. In the late 1990s, they first met and forged a friendship akin to that of O.R. Tambo and Olof Palme.

In June, Ambassador Juholt had the joy of reconnecting with his old-time friend, Vusi, to share new music, discuss upcoming projects, and explore how music can once again strengthen the people-to-people relations between South Africans and Swedes. Their reunion not only celebrated their enduring friendship but also highlighted the transformative power of music in fostering understanding and friendship.



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