

Regional Dialogue on Human Rights and Local Governance in Asia and the Pacific

Good morning everyone and welcome to Manila!

It is my pleasure to give the welcoming remarks in this Dialogue-forum, focused on human rights and local governance in Asia and the Pacific, and organized by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, one of the foremost academic institutions on human rights in the world with a focus on education and capacity building. I am proud it is placed in Sweden, at the University of Lund which is my alma mater.

Sweden is and will continue to be a strong voice that stands up for and defends human rights, democracy, and rule of law throughout our foreign policy.

All human rights are – and must be – universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, be they civil, political, economic, cultural, or social.

Human rights, democracy, and the rule of law were also at the core of our Presidency of the Council of the European Union which we held during the first half of 2023. These were not just political priorities – since they are the very foundation upon which sustainable peace, security and resilient societies are built. They are also shared common values of the EU and its member states.

Russia's unlawful aggression against Ukraine is a flagrant violation of one of the most basic rules of international law and the UN Charter, threatening the international rule-based order and every country's



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Manila

rights to independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Russia's blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports and targeting of port infrastructure has disrupted the global food supply and exacerbated the hunger crisis affecting the world's most vulnerable countries. It is a war of global concern and not a matter confined to the borders of Europe. It challenges the global security order for all of us.

It exposes how one country's human rights and democratic regression becomes a threat, not only to its own citizens, but also to its neighbours.

I am very glad that the Philippines have supported every UN General Assembly-resolution condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration was created out of the ashes of the Second World War that had a horrendous impact on Asia Pacific and cost millions of lives, including hundreds of thousands here the Philippines. . The Declaration and the human rights treaties that followed, have transformed our societies - and our world - in profound ways.

Women and men from all continents, from different religious, political and philosophical traditions helped create this system. To prove one thing: that war, oppression and glaring inequalities do not have to be the destiny of mankind. It was created in the hope - and the conviction - that we can and must do better.

And it has made a difference in many countries and parts of the world.

Sweden is an example of this. **It developed from a poor country, where many people emigrated due to poverty – as many as 1/6 of the population between 1880s and 1930s - to a high-income country with strong welfare.** This wouldn't have been possible without the development of transparent democratic institutions and rule of law, equal voting rights, women's political participation, protection of labour rights, equal access to education and healthcare for all. The advances in women's and girls' enjoyment of human rights - including sexual and reproductive health and rights –have gone hand in hand with our democratic and economic development.

Indeed, this development has shown us that **democracy and human rights deliver if they are implemented.**

Today we live in challenging times, we must do our utmost to uphold the international laws and institutions that we have jointly created and designed, and that have served us in creating freer, more prosperous and more equal societies, with less hunger and less fear. We need to continue our efforts for more prosperous societies where also the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights can be ensured – challenges especially daunting in the face of the global economic crisis and climate change.

The sovereignty and territorial integrity of every State, and the equal rights and dignity of every person must be respected. Accountability for violations and abuses must be ensured.

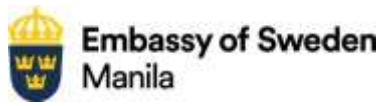
Inequalities and poverty are not just about material hardship it's also about discrimination, exclusion and limited possibilities for individuals to influence their situation. Peoples' voices, their participation, and

representation from diverse backgrounds and genders allow us to learn, to understand and to make use of each person's unique knowledge and ability to contribute to durable solutions. In this regard a vibrant civil society and independent media contributes with valuable insights and constructive critique, perspectives, and recommendations.

A forum such as this focused on integrating a human rights-based approach (HRBA) into local policies and programs in Asian cities and conducted together with representatives from local government, civil society and academia is very important to move the issues forward. Ideally the business sector should also be involved since business is crucial to sustainable socio-economic development and to the scientific and technical progress that accompanies it.

From a **Swedish perspective, businesses as well as government need to be carriers of human rights**, for example they need to ensure that their supply chains are clean both in terms of human and environmental resources. Here in the Philippines, companies such as IKEA and H&M work with the United Nations to ensure that this is the case, for example that no person involved in their supply chain has been trafficked. We are proud that our companies practice CSR as an integrated part of their business operations. CSR includes environmental, but also social and economic sustainability i.e., the importance of good labor conditions, decent salaries, non-discrimination and respect for gender diversity, as well as transparency and anti-corruption measures.

I wish you the best of luck with exploring and exchanging strategies to integrate the human rights agenda at the local level so that inequalities and poverty can be addressed and urban development, sustainable cities and climate mitigation be turned into reality. And look forward to seeing you again at the dinner tonight.



Thank you!