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Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, Wednesday 15 February 2006

Mr/Madam Speaker,

I feel I must open the foreign policy debate with the story that has dominated world events lately. Events that demand discussion: the protests against the publication of provocative images of the Prophet Mohammed.

We have all seen the pictures in the news. Pictures of deep humiliation and frustration. Of burning flags and embassies. Pictures few people had expected, but that show clearly how interconnected the world is.

It is important to make it quite clear that our society and the Government defend freedom of expression. However, the deep sense of insult felt by Muslims around the world is a reminder that freedom of the press must be accompanied by responsibility and respect. Sweden can never accept attacks on embassies or on Swedish citizens. The Government has therefore protested to the government of Syria about the damage done to the Swedish embassy in Damascus. All countries must take their responsibility to protect, and prevent extremists from stirring up and exploiting the anger and frustration of people who feel insulted.

The Government is engaged in close dialogue with the Muslim countries, with our Nordic neighbours and other EU countries, as well as with

representatives of the Muslim organisations in Sweden. Our long-sustained commitment to peace in the Middle East, our institutions, such as the Swedish Institute in Alexandria and the Consulate-General in Istanbul, and our partnership with Egypt in hosting the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation in Alexandria, give Sweden great experience and credibility when it comes to dialogue between countries and cultures. The Government will take further initiatives for dialogue, both in Sweden and in the EU, in Mediterranean cooperation and in the United Nations.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Today's globalised world creates new threats – and opportunities. The Government's foreign policy proceeds from the recognition that security, development and human rights presuppose and reinforce one another.

This common way forward was staked out by the UN World Summit, chaired by Prime Minister Göran Persson. Nowhere is this way forward as obvious as in Africa. Nowhere are the connections between human rights, development and security so crucial. Nowhere is Sweden's foreign policy more clearly reflected.

In Africa we are taking our responsibility for international peace and security. We see a consistent line of Swedish commitment to Africa and to the UN, from Dag Hammarskjöld's mission in Congo, via Anna Lindh's initiative to stop an impending genocide in eastern Congo, to the present day.

Sweden is prepared to continue to contribute troops to UN missions for peace and security in Africa.

Right now, the eyes of the world are upon Darfur and the genocide that has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and driven millions from their homes. Now, when the African Union, which has made important contributions, is prepared to let the UN take over, we are reminded of the landmark decision at the UN World Summit on the responsibility to protect civilian populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. If a government does not live up to this obligation, the international community has both a right and a responsibility to intervene. There must be a political solution to the conflict and the Government is contributing by appointing a new mediator for Darfur and a special adviser for the Horn of Africa. Sweden is also maintaining its involvement in the Great Lakes region, by appointing a special adviser and by other measures.

Our solidarity is put to the test in Africa. Now, when the people and leaders of Africa are taking increased responsibility for the development of the continent, we support them in their struggle. And we are seeing progress. The autocratic rule of presidents for life is giving way to general elections and political pluralism. Economic growth is raising the prospects of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. At the same time, the AIDS epidemic in Africa claims 6 000 victims a day. Twelve million children have lost parents because of AIDS.

Development assistance levels are important. There is a shortfall of six billion dollars in the global fight against HIV/AIDS alone. When Sweden becomes the only country in the world to reach the one per cent target this year, this will not merely mean a few billion kronor more from us for the struggle. It also gives us great credibility in spurring on other countries, as when the EU countries agreed last year to reach a development assistance level of 0.7 per cent by 2015. The design of development assistance is also crucial. Sweden is now constructing a modern system of development cooperation based on a rights perspective and the perspective of the poor. We only cooperate with

countries that have a poverty reduction policy in place. Our cooperation builds on respect for human rights, on good governance, on democratic processes. If developments move in the wrong direction, as in Zimbabwe, the grounds for cooperation come under threat. We take responsibility for the way Swedish funds are used. A new government agency will make sure that development cooperation meets a high standard. However, development assistance alone cannot eradicate poverty. We are therefore acting to strengthen trade and investment in Africa and to dismantle the barriers to trade that affect African goods and services, and we are supporting the growing involvement of Swedish companies in Africa.

In Africa our common values concerning human rights and international law take practical form. When Nelson Mandela was elected president in the first free elections in South Africa in 1994, it was a triumph for Sweden's support for the fight against apartheid and colonialism as well.

When Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became Africa's first elected woman president after years of civil war in Liberia, the potential of strong commitment from the international community is clearly demonstrated. The interest and commitment of other countries makes a difference, and Sweden has played an important part. One important contribution is a long-term cooperation with the countries of West Africa led by State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Hans Dahlgren, acting as EU representative. Sweden is participating in a modern UN mission that combines a robust peace-keeping force with efforts to promote mediation, reintegration of child soldiers, institution building and gender equality. In neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, peace efforts are being led by UN envoy Pierre Schori.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden's security policy is steadfast, active and inspired by solidarity, and rests on the foundation of non-participation in military alliances.

The Government is raising its level of ambition for participation by Sweden in international missions. This spring Sweden will double its presence in Afghanistan. Our mission in Liberia is being extended until the end of the year. In January the Government delivered a report drawn up under the leadership of the Folke Bernadotte Academy to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, with 70 concrete recommendations on how to develop UN peace-keeping operations. Sweden has credibility with regard to military and civilian peace-support operations, reconstruction and conflict prevention. This credibility will be important now as the new UN Peacebuilding Commission begins its work.

The Government wants to strengthen the European Union as a global foreign and security policy actor. The EU is in a unique position to meet the challenges of the future across the board, from environmental to security policy. When we take part in shaping EU policy, it becomes an extension of our own. When the EU works for peace, it speaks on our behalf. By contributing to EU security policy measures, we also strengthen our own security. We can use cooperation in the EU as a lever for our foreign and security policy – while not hesitating to state our own opinions.

In the space of a few years, the EU has moved from words to action in the area of crisis management. The EU is currently engaged in thirteen peace-support operations all over the world. Swedish military personnel, police officers, lawyers and experts are making vital contributions in Bosnia, in Gaza and in Aceh in Indonesia, contributions we should be proud of. Sweden commands one of the military rapid reaction forces that are now being built up, with Finland, Norway and Estonia the other

participants. In response to a Government initiative, the EU is now also establishing civilian rapid reaction units.

The enlargement of the EU strengthens our security and gives more countries a neighbour that contributes to peace and democracy. The Government looks forward to welcoming Bulgaria and Romania as members, hopefully from the beginning of next year. The possibility of closer ties with the EU has provided the Balkan countries with incentives for reforms and peaceful cooperation. It is a great achievement that Croatia can begin membership negotiations and that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where Anna Lindh and Javier Solana actively helped avert a civil war just four years ago, is gaining candidate country status. The EU perspective will play a central role in the negotiations on the status of Kosovo this year.

With enlargement, Sweden has acquired a new neighbouring region, which extends across the Black Sea area into Central Asia and is becoming increasingly important for our security and in other respects. In our new neighbourhood, the OSCE and the Council of Europe play central though often discreet roles. Sweden's active advocacy of Turkish membership has yielded good results. The membership negotiations extend our neighbourhood more clearly to the Middle East. The Government continues to drive for enlargement. The EU is a peace project, not just historically but for the 21st century too.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Twenty years ago, radioactive substances were spread from Chernobyl over the Baltic Sea to Swedish beaches and mushroom forests. Sweden has contributed extensive funds to reducing radiation from Chernobyl and improving safety at other nuclear power plants. Today we are witnessing other threats to our security, which can only be met by greater cooperation. The gas supply disputes show that the energy issue, like the

unsustainable environmental situation in the Baltic Sea, needs more discussion around the Baltic Sea and in the EU. When Sweden becomes President of the Council of the Baltic Sea States this year, we will give priority to sustainable development and the fight against organised crime and trafficking in human beings, which affects increasing numbers of women and children.

The Prime Minister's visit to Kiev at the end of January helped to further deepen our relations with Ukraine. Sweden is one of the countries in the EU that is most clearly advocating a membership perspective for Ukraine as well as membership of the World Trade Organisation in the near future. The Ukrainian people's successful struggle for freedom and democracy benefits the whole of Europe.

Sweden wants to strengthen cooperation with Russia. During the year, a broad initiative to promote Sweden will be conducted in Russia. In a few days, a Consulate-General will be inaugurated in Kaliningrad. The Government wants to intensify the dialogue with Russia on our relations with the countries in the common neighbourhood of the EU and Russia. It is in everyone's interest that the remaining conflicts in Georgia and Moldova be solved and that democracy and freedom prevail in Central Asia and Belarus. Our dialogue also includes the disturbing situation for NGOs and the media. There must be a peaceful solution to the Chechnya conflict.

Belarus is governed by a hard-line, authoritarian regime. Sweden's support to the democratisation of Belarus is best expressed through involvement – not isolation. The Government will take further initiatives internationally to support long-term democratic development in Belarus. Swedish organisations and parties are making an invaluable contribution together with their Belarusian partner organisations.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

In order to meet present and future threats, the Government wants to further strengthen international cooperation on foreign and security policy, based on Sweden's non-participation in military alliances.

Inherent in today's broader threat scenario, described by the Swedish Defence Commission and others, is a greater insight that we can also be affected, something that the terrorist attack in Bali, the tsunami disaster and most recently, the embassy attacks have demonstrated in a terrible manner. These threats must be met with a greater emergency preparedness and with much broader cooperation, such as within the EU or the UN. In the past year, we have strengthened our preparedness to manage serious crises and to assist Swedes in distress abroad, and have developed cooperation in the Nordic countries and the EU. We have set up a special stand-by force that will strengthen consular activities at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the event of emergencies. We have created a rapid reaction force, able at short notice to travel to affected areas so as to strengthen the work of embassies in the field. We have also strengthened contingency planning at missions abroad and in various ways are continuing to work on improving our society's capacity to help Swedes affected by emergencies and disasters abroad.

Let me make it clear that it is important to have broad cooperation with NATO within the framework of our present partnership. We value our cooperation with NATO, but see no reason for Sweden to join NATO. Non-participation in military alliances gives us both the independence our international commitments need and the opportunity to participate in international cooperation for peace and security.

It has been an advantage for Sweden and for our security that there has been general agreement on Swedish security policy principles. Now the two leading opposition parties are advocating Swedish membership of

NATO. This makes it important for the different parties in the Riksdag to present their views on NATO membership here and explain how they would pursue this issue should they be in government.

A central concern for the Government is to develop the transatlantic link and Sweden's cooperation with the United States. Just as we need a commitment from the USA on global issues, the USA needs the international community to enable it to deal with its own threat scenario. The opening of the new Swedish Embassy, House of Sweden, symbolises the Government's ambition to deepen its relationship with the USA.

The fact that Sweden does not participate in military alliances and is therefore not involved in defence cooperation that includes nuclear weapons strengthens our position in the fight against weapons of mass destruction. The threat of nuclear weapons remains and is also assuming new forms. The nuclear-weapons states continue to rely on their gigantic arsenals. At the same time more states, as well as terrorist organisations, are trying to obtain weapons of mass destruction.

It is unfortunate that no results on disarmament and non-proliferation could be achieved last year, either at the NPT Review Conference or at the UN World Summit. The Government is now looking forward to proposals to be presented by the International Commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction, headed by Hans Blix, which could provide a basis for renewed initiatives in this extremely important area.

Sweden is following developments in Iran and North Korea closely. Iran's unacceptable behaviour gives rise to mounting concerns that its nuclear programme is not exclusively peaceful. It is not in any country's interest that Iran acquires nuclear weapons. The pressure on Iran's leadership must be kept up. In the longer term, the whole of the Middle East should be made a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. The

Government is continuing its active Korean policy and its recent appointment of a special adviser will be one means of working towards a solution of the conflict in the Korean peninsula and getting North Korea to cease its nuclear weapons programme.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Our development policy is based on the vision of equitable and sustainable global development.

Sweden is now increasing its development assistance, a step that is motivated by solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, but also by the realisation that international peace and security require global justice. Many of today's threats and crises are rooted in an unequal distribution of resources and a lack of freedom, democracy and human rights. The increase in development assistance will create new opportunities. With regard to gender equality, for example, we are drawing up a national action plan for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and are strengthening efforts for sexual and reproductive health and rights. Other relevant areas are the environment and employment and trade, which are as crucial for growth and prosperity in developing countries as they are in Sweden. The Government is strengthening efforts to promote respect for trade union rights and decent working conditions through such initiatives as the Swedish Partnership for Global Responsibility, as well as efforts to save lives and alleviate suffering in conflicts and natural disasters.

The Government is actively working for ambitious results this year in the World Trade Organisation's Doha Round. The developing countries must be given better opportunities to sell their goods and services and agricultural subsidies must be radically reduced. Free trade and fair rules bring advantages to us all: to the developing countries and to our growth and welfare. We are increasing trade-related development assistance by

30 per cent so as to support developing countries' participation in international trade. We are adding new posts at some thirty embassies and consulates so as to promote Swedish companies abroad and contribute to foreign investment in Sweden.

Asia's importance in the world economy continues to increase. The Government is developing economic relations with countries in this region. The reform efforts of the developing countries in Asia and their integration into the global economy require continuing support. The growing economic power of China and India means that these countries will also be expected to play a responsible role in the global arena. Despite economic progress, poverty remains the greatest challenge in Asia, along with human rights, democracy issues and environmental damage. In the spring, Sweden is organising an international conference on development assistance to the people of Burma.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Our policy for human rights and international law pervades our entire foreign policy.

An effective global legal system is the ultimate guarantee for our security. Respect for common rules is also essential for development, as well as for personal freedom. World leaders confirmed their responsibility for a world order based on international law at the UN World Summit.

But in a globalised world, the law must extend to everyone. Acts of terrorism always constitute a breach of international law. The fight against terrorism must have the highest priority and always be conducted with respect for human rights and humanitarian law. Responsibility also rests with individuals. Sweden is one of the most prominent advocates of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has now begun its work. Institutions of international law such as human rights monitoring bodies

and the International Court of Justice in The Hague must be strengthened.

International law, humanitarian law and human rights guide the position taken by the Government in current conflicts. This is particularly clear in the Middle East. This is why we supported the establishment of the State of Israel and defend its right to live in security within recognised borders, and this is why we condemn the statements made by the president of Iran. This is why Sweden supports the right of Palestinians to a state of their own. And this is why we consider that a solution to the conflict – which can only be achieved through negotiations – must be based on international law.

Through the evacuation of Gaza and parts of the West Bank, Israel's government took a courageous first step towards total withdrawal from occupied Palestinian land and closing the settlements. The Palestinian parliamentary elections have now been conducted in a dignified manner. A completely new political situation has emerged that the international community and Israel must deal with in a sensible way.

Support for peace efforts on the part of Sweden and the EU must continue. We also want to continue our development support to the Palestinian areas. However, the level of cooperation depends upon the actions of the new Palestinian government. It must dissociate itself from violence in words and deeds, and accept Israel's right to exist.

During the spring the Government will draw up a regional strategy for development cooperation with the Middle East and North Africa in support of domestic processes for democracy and human rights. This is in line with our commitment to building a democratic state based on the rule of law in Iraq, and to the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination. We want to further develop our good relations with the region, which is made easier in that large groups of Swedish citizens

have their roots there, as well as to intensify our commitment to resolving the conflicts in the region. Opening the EU to goods from the Middle East and North Africa is important for economic development. Recent events must be met with more dialogue and contact, not less.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

It is a human right to seek asylum. Refugee policy begins when people are forced to flee on account of conflicts and oppression. We provide strong support to the UN Refugee Agency for their protection and help. Refugees who make their way to Sweden and other EU countries must be given refuge here. Sweden is currently implementing major reforms to strengthen the right of asylum. When the Aliens Appeals Board is replaced by procedures in the courts it will constitute the largest reform ever conducted in the area of migration. We are continuing to work for an ambitious European refugee policy based on the right of asylum. We want to see a legally secure and predictable asylum procedure in all EU countries and in countries that currently lack a functional asylum system. The EU should have its own refugee quota, and migration issues must be a distinct part of the EU European Neighbourhood Policy.

Migration can act as a lever for development, for individual people and for countries. More international cooperation is needed in order to promote the positive effects of global migration. Sweden has contributed through the establishment of the Global Commission on International Migration and we welcome the fact that the UN General Assembly will discuss global migration issues this year.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Just as we did in Africa, Sweden was at the forefront in supporting the fight for human rights and democracy in Latin America. We supported the struggle against Chile's dictator Augusto Pinochet. Sweden took in

tens of thousands of Chilean refugees. The election of Michelle Bachelet, herself a former exile, symbolises the progress made in Chile and Latin America. In country after country, dictators have fallen and guerrilla movements have made way for new political parties. People previously excluded from power have been elected in democratic elections. Metal-worker Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is president of Brazil; Evo Morales, who stems from the discriminated indigenous people, is Bolivia's head of state. This development must now also lead to improved conditions for the poor. Sweden is strengthening its political and economic ties with Latin America. At the same time we remain concerned about the human rights violations in Cuba.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Fifty years ago, the UN's first peace-support operation succeeded in solving the Suez crisis by peaceful means. The then Secretary-General of the UN Dag Hammarskjöld attributed this success to support from "the medium-sized powers". Countries that are big enough to be heard in the international community, yet small enough to share the insight into the value of international cooperation. Sweden is one such country.

We are a strong voice for international law and global cooperation for reasons of solidarity and because they benefit our security. The UN has a unique role when it comes to international peace and security. One of the Government's top foreign policy priorities is UN reform: the establishment of a peacebuilding commission and a strong council for human rights, global unity in the fight against terrorism and fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals, a reformed Security Council and a more efficient administration. Sweden is playing a leading role through the President of the General Assembly Jan Eliasson and through the Prime Minister's network for UN reform.

In 2006 Sweden will achieve the goal of allocating one per cent of our income to development cooperation and will continue working to create open and fair conditions for international trade and investment. Based on a policy of non-participation in military alliances, we are conducting an active and steadfast security policy with an increasing number of military and civilian crisis management operations and credible efforts for disarmament. Sweden is active in the UN, the EU and our own vicinity, as well as in the Middle East and Africa. We are raising our ambitions regarding mediation and increasing the number of special envoys. We are strengthening our efforts for increased dialogue between cultures. Sweden conducts a broad spectrum of policies with a focus on human rights.

Our active foreign policy is based on our conviction that there is an interconnection between security, development and human rights. In today's globalised world, this is clearer than ever before. Poverty, acts of cruelty, conflicts, violence and terror reinforce one another. But when war is exchanged for peace, dictatorship is followed by democracy, poverty is turned into development, acts of cruelty are replaced by respect for human rights, and confrontation gives way to dialogue, global security and development are strengthened, as are our own. These interconnections will continue to guide Sweden's foreign policy.

Thank you.