

**Address by H.E. Mr. Niclas Trouvé, Ambassador of Sweden, on the occasion of the Award Ceremony to Prevent Violence against Women, Erbil, 25 November 2007**

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Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Minister for Sports and Youth, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Dear Friends,

It is a privilege and an honour indeed for me to be invited and to make an address on this important occasion. Every time I come to the beautiful region of Kurdistan, I am met by warmth and hospitality. The links between the Swedish and the Kurdish Peoples are strong. In Hawler I feel that I am among friends. Let me express my sincere gratitude to the Honourable Minister of Sports and Youth, Mr. Taha Barwary, and to the Kurdistan Regional Government, for inviting me to participate at tonight's ceremony and for taking the excellent initiative to hand out an award to reward those who work to prevent violence against women. This subject is important to every one of us, irrespective of being man or woman, old or young, married or unmarried. The importance goes beyond nationality and religion. It is a question of respect for every human being's equal rights. Nowhere is this better expressed than in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by all nations already 50 years ago:

*“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”.*

This commitment of all nations is also expressed in the new constitution of the Republic of Iraq, which stipulates that:

*“Each individual has the right to enjoy life, security and liberty. Deprivation or restriction of those rights is prohibited.”*

Violence and injustice is independent of where we live. Traditions, religions and laws differ between countries. But this is largely irrelevant. When hurt or threatened, we all suffer equally, man or woman, Swede or Kurd, Christian or Muslim. Because we are all human beings. Traditions can therefore never be used as an excuse to violate the rights of others. Compassion has to replace violence. Violence is wrong. Violence is criminal.

In the Kurdistan region, in Iraq as a whole, and indeed in my own country Sweden, women are being violated every day. Very often, threats and violence take place within marriages and within families and homes. Some cases are reported to the police and dealt with through legal procedures, but others are hidden and never reported at all. This often leads to repeated offences and continued suffering, sometimes even to suicide. Children, apart from sometimes being violated themselves, are traumatized for the rest of their lives from experiencing violence within the family, for example against their mothers and sisters. The old saying that “violence breeds more violence” should be a reminder to all of us when trying to create a better future for our children.

Only last week, the Swedish Government launched a comprehensive action plan regarding violence against women. It includes 56 concrete measures to be taken and it allocates 800 million Swedish Crowns (or roughly 85 million Euro) to carry out the

proposals. The action plan is a priority for the entire Government. Let me mention a few elements:

- Overview of existing legislation regarding violence against women and more resources to the police for information and education initiatives
- Prevention of arranged marriages, that is marriages without the consent of both parties;
- Increased protection of and support to women being victims of violence;
- Opening of a virtual youth centre on the internet for information, consultation and dialogue;
- Increased resources to improve the illumination of streets and foot paths and make access to public transportation safer for women;
- Increased funding of research and education programmes regarding violence against women and of efforts to prevent honorary related violence;

This comprehensive strategy shows the importance that the Swedish Government attaches to this issue. The commitment to address all kinds of violence against women, injustice and discrimination enjoys a broad political and popular support in Sweden. Public opinion and media are following these issues with keen interest and attention. This is true not least when it comes to the issue of so called honorary related violence. In Sweden, there have been cases when women have been killed by men in their own families. These crimes have stirred up strong emotions of grief and solidarity among Swedes and they have triggered a very lively public debate. I know that the issue of honorary killings of women have also been a focus for the debate here in the Kurdistan region. I think we can all agree that there is nothing “honorary” with killing or violating women!

It has been noted very positively by the International Community at large that the Kurdistan Regional Government has taken a clear stand against all forms of violence against women. Especially, His Excellency Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, in a speech on 17 July 2007 made it absolutely clear that:

*“Government and law enforcement will not tolerate abuse or physical violence toward the women of our society. No man has a right to harm any woman. Women are due respect and admiration for their contributions to the family, to society, and to the Kurdistan Region”.*

The declaration of the Prime Minister gives evidence of moral leadership in this important issue. It sends a signal to all men in the society of what is unacceptable and illegal. It also gives hope to many violated women of a better future. And most of all, it strengthens the modern Kurdistan region.

Finally, let me congratulate the winner of this year’s Award for initiatives to eliminate violence against women”. I hope that such initiatives will multiply and that the violence will truly be eliminated. I look forward to continuing the cooperation between Sweden and the Kurdistan region towards this important objective.

Thank You! Spas!