



PERMANENT MISSION OF SWEDEN
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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**Statement by Annika Söder, State Secretary for International
Development Cooperation, Sweden**

Dear Friends,

It is an honour for me to speak in front of you all, and a special honour to speak in the presence of president Kibaki. I want to thank UNIFEM for arranging this event.

The first issue highlighted as a strategic objective, and a critical area of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, was women and poverty, and the lack of women's access to economic opportunity and autonomy. This year we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and although women's presence in the workforce has grown, the progress is uneven and slow. Women continue to be concentrated in jobs with low pay and authority levels, and there continues to be a lack of gender analysis in many economic and social policies.

This year's Report on the Progress of the World's Women reminds us that the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is a vital tool in sustainable development and in order to overcome poverty. But foremost, this is about the right of women and girls to live in dignity, freedom of want and freedom from fear on par with men and boys

Working to promote women's access to decent employment and safe working conditions translates into economic growth at all levels -

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individual and community as well as national - through i a food security and good health. Also, decent work and an income as well as education comprise key forms of protection against gender-based violence including domestic violence and trafficking.

My government attaches great importance to this issue. Employment deserves to be high on the international agenda for poverty reduction. Job creation and social protection in the labour market are corner stones in the construction of development with poverty reduction.

Labour has been termed the poor person's only asset. Hence, where poverty prevails, human capital is the primary resource that society can mobilize. It has been shown by both the World Bank and the ILO that economic growth in many parts of the world has failed to deliver employment. In fact, increasing joblessness has marked several growth economies.

Our own national experience is that labour market policies can and should assist the promotion of change and that these policies are to be regarded as an important element in the management of change. The main objective is not to save jobs but to save people, to create new opportunities and security for the individuals. Active labour market policies should therefore also be an instrument in lessening calls for protectionist policies.

The Swedish government has chosen the area of employment and of gender equality as two priority areas within our development cooperation.

Sweden is reaching 1% of GNI in ODA in 2006.

Sweden is a strong voice in the work on gender equality, and one of the few countries that always highlight gender issues in poverty reduction. We support the work on sexual and reproductive health and rights, young peoples right to information on sexual and reproductive issues, women's right to participation and ownership etc.

Employment issues are a forgotten perspective. Sweden highlight issues like the formalisation of the informal work sector, the strengthening of labour policies in developing countries, and the implementation of ILO policies.

The situation for women in the informal sector is of particular concern. In most developing countries, the formal sector represents only a minor part of employment. Work performed in the informal sector underpins the life of the poor, and women bear the brunt of that burden. I believe that we need to do work to define a labour market in a country where the formal economy does not represent the common way of finding one's livelihood. This entails adjusting the formal political and economic life to the real life situation of women in the informal sector.

The normative ahead include making use of the chapters on employment and gender in the Summit outcome document. We should also make use the new Commission on the Empowerment of the Poor and see to it that the perspective of women in the informal sector is highlighted there.

The work on the field includes getting this issue in to the Poverty Reduction Strategies, and to work with our partners in development cooperation, including the multilaterals.

I thank UNIFEM and Martha Chen for their important contribution to the international work in this field