



18 October 2021

Oral statement to the CEDAW Committee 80th session Review of Sweden

First, in relation to arms transfers, our submission¹ follows up on the Committee's 2016 recommendation, that Sweden "ensure that the new legislation to regulate the export of arms includes a strong and robust gender-specific perspective."

We recall that in GR30, the Committee has stressed that State parties are obligated to focus on the prevention of conflict and all forms of violence, including robust and effective regulation of the arms trade and to prevent the use of arms to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence.

The new law does not include a gender perspective. It only envisages that serious and extensive human rights violation should constitute an obstacle to the granting of arms exports authorisations. Such assessments are made only for new licenses and not for follow-up deliveries to arms transfers authorised previously. This is problematic as follow-up deliveries can last for years or decades and can include new war material.

In our submission, we have highlighted the inconsistencies between Sweden's own human rights assessment in relation to gender-based violence and its licensing of arms exports. Sweden has authorized transfers of arms or military equipment to several countries in which serious acts of gender-based violence are being committed:

For instance, **Pakistan**, that the Swedish MFA's report ranks as one of the world's most dangerous countries for women, where their enjoyment of human rights is consistently violated and sexual abuse is widespread.

¹
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fCSS%2fSWE%2f43279&Lang=en

Another example is the **Philippines**, a country for which the CEDAW Committee has expressed concerns about the high prevalence of gender-based violence against women and girls, including by members of the armed forces.

These are only examples. Our submission contains information on over a dozen countries, including a specific section relating to exports to countries involved in the war in Yemen. The MFA's own country reports on the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar highlight that women's rights are severely limited; they also criticize the warfare and violations of international law and of human rights committed by the Saudi-led coalition.

We encourage the Committee to ask questions about the inconsistencies between Sweden's human rights assessments and its licensing of arms exports, and to continue to make recommendations on this issue.

The Committee has previously commended Sweden for its Feminist Foreign Policy. However, the agency in charge of authorizing arms exports (the ISP), is not held accountable under the government's Action Plan for the Feminist Foreign Policy, nor under the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Instead, the Feminist Foreign Policy focuses on small arms and light weapons, a type of weapon which Sweden has limited exports of, and ignores the consequences of exports of other types of weapons and military equipment.

The ISP should be required to report under the Action Plans for the Feminist Foreign Policy and the UNSCR 1325. This would compel the agency to acquire the necessary skills and training to make adequate gender-specific risk assessments before issuing arms export authorizations. We know this is currently not happening from regular meetings with the agency despite the Swedish government reporting that "the risk of the arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence, or serious acts of violence against women or children, is considered."

In addition, the ISP should get support from authorities with expertise in gender and conflict-prevention to ensure that risk assessments of arms exports include rigorous gender analysis.

We encourage the Committee to ask questions and make recommendations about the continued lack of a gender-specific perspective in the regulation of arms exports, as well as regarding the need for strengthening of gender and conflict-prevention expertise at the Swedish arms export control agency (the ISP).