

Annex to Government  
decision  
UF2009/27888/UP

## **Memorandum**

23 April 2009

### **Strategy for special initiatives for democratisation and freedom of expression, 2009- 2011**

#### **Summary**

This strategy governs Sida's implementation of the Government's initiative for democratisation and freedom of expression. The initiative spans over several years and aims at strengthening actors for change, individuals, groups and civil society organisations, working for democratisation and freedom of expression.

The initiative will primarily focus on predictable support to strengthen democracy and freedom of expression and *prompt requests for support to assist* private individuals, groups or civil society organisations working for democracy and freedom of expression. Using this strategy, the Government supplements its work on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Funds of SEK 100 million will be at Sida's disposal in 2009 for this initiative to promote democratisation and freedom of expression. The volume for future years will be determined in connection with decisions on Sida's appropriation directions each year.

#### **1. Introduction**

The Government's overall policy for global development is permeated by a rights perspective and the perspective of the poor on development. The rights perspective places the focus on the freedom and rights of individuals.

As emphasised in the Government Communication to the Riksdag on Sweden's Policy for Global Development (Govt. Communication 2007/08:89, Report 2007/08:UU5, Riksdag Communication 2007/08:252), Sweden must stand up for people whose lives are put at risk because of their opinions. Every individual, whether alone or with others, must be free to express her or his opinions and to receive and disseminate information and ideas. This is a fundamental freedom and an essential precondition for fighting all forms of oppression. Freedom of expression also strengthens people's ability to influence their own lives.

In the Government Communication ‘Freedom from Oppression: a Communication on Development Assistance to Democracy’ (Govt. Communication 2008/09:11, Report 2008/09:UU6, Riksdag Communication 2008/09:187), the Government emphasises three priority areas: civil and political rights, the institutions and procedures of democracy and the rule of law, and actors in the democratisation process.

The Government is conducting work to promote democracy in order to create the conditions for women and men to assert, and actively exercise, their political and civil rights and by doing so, acquire influence over their conditions of life. In this work, the Government is taking forceful action internationally within the context of the EU, the UN system and other organisations, and in direct dialogue with partner countries to fight all forms of oppression.

Experience of previously successful democratisation processes shows that actors for change in civil society are of key importance in work to increase democracy and freedom of expression.

With this as a starting point, the Government now conducts a multi-year initiative to support actors for change so as to strengthen democracy and freedom of expression. This initiative supplements and strengthens the Government’s other development cooperation for democracy, the rule of law and human rights. It targets private individuals, groups or civil society organisations, at local, national, regional and global levels alike, and attends to threats against democracy and freedom of expression, and restrictions on the freedoms and rights of women and men.

This multi-year strategy governs Sida’s implementation of the Government’s new initiative for democratisation and freedom of expression. The strategy applies to the period 2009–2011.

## **2. Objective**

The objective of the strategy is strengthened actors for change, working for increased democratisation and freedom of expression. The new initiative for democratisation and freedom of expression will help reduce various forms of oppression that hinder people’s ability to lift themselves out of poverty and prevent equitable and sustainable global development. By doing so, the initiative will contribute to the Government’s objective of international development cooperation to create the conditions for poor people to improve their conditions of life. It will also contribute to the Government’s overall objective of equitable and sustainable global development.

This means, for example, increasing the scope of actors for change to disseminate and receive information and opinions. It also means providing these actors with the opportunity to work for pluralism and freedom of opinion, which can pave the way for democratic, transparent decision-making and changes in legislation, etc., that limits freedom of association, freedom of the press, access to Internet, the right to a fair hearing in court and the right to defence, and otherwise restricts civil rights and liberties.

## **3. Implementation, organisation and volume**

### *Target groups*

Support will be directed at actors for change working to promote democratisation and freedom of expression in countries where such rights are threatened and that qualify for funding via development cooperation.

Actors for change who will be eligible for support will be nationally based, or where appropriate, exile-based private individuals, groups or civil society organisations, including human rights defenders, trade unions, free and independent media (radio, TV, newspapers and Internet) and journalists, politically active people, actors in cultural life, researchers, women's rights groups, religious communities and other organisations in civil society and relevant actors working for increased democratisation and freedom of expression.

#### *Direction*

The initiative will focus partly on predictable support to strengthen democracy and freedom of expression and partly on *prompt requests for contributions* to assist private individuals, groups or civil society organisations working for democratisation and freedom of expression.

Support can be given in the form of organisational support and project support. It can be used for expenses regarding the dissemination of information, campaigns, education, legal activism, capacity building, etc. and include, for example, the costs of offices, travel, meeting activities, Internet and mobile telephony.

#### *Allocation of grants*

It will be possible to allocate support both *for more predictable and prompt requests at national, regional and global level, after application procedure.*

Support will be able to be given both to actors for change with whom Sida has previously cooperated and to actors that Sida has not previously supported.

Support to actors for change may be allocated via third parties such as civil society organisations and party-affiliated organisations.

Exile organisations may also be supported, where the activities of these organisations aim at strengthening actors for change in the country of origin.

Swedish diplomatic missions abroad will also be able to process and allocate parts of the support.

There must be a financial preparedness within Sida for urgent initiatives during the year.

Special efforts must be made to provide broad information about the activities covered by this strategy, particularly in order to reach new actors for change.

#### *Grounds for assessment*

Assessment of initiatives should be based on how the support rendered comply with the fundamental purposes of the strategy and on the support being broad with regard to geographical and thematic focus and to its distribution among various categories of actors for change.

In consultation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida will formulate further guidelines for managing support that ensures rapid, effective administration.

When deciding on initiatives involving sensitive and volatile political processes and that, for example, affect relations with the country of operations, Sida will primarily consult with the head of the Swedish diplomatic mission in the country concerned.

Regular consultations on the implementation of the initiative will be held twice a year between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida. At these consultations, an account will be given of implemented, ongoing and planned initiatives.

#### *Volume*

Funds of SEK 100 million will be at Sida's disposal in 2009 for special initiatives to promote democratisation and freedom of expression. The volume for future years will be determined in connection with decisions on Sida's appropriation directions each year.

#### **4. Reporting back and evaluation**

Every year, Sida will submit a report of activities implemented in a special communication presented at the same time as Sida's annual report to the Government Offices (Ministry for Foreign Affairs). This report will include assessments of these activities, thematic and geographical outcome and support via different types of actors for change. The report will serve as a basis for the Government's decision regarding the volume, etc., of further support.

In its 2011 report, Sida will present, in writing, a comprehensive performance analysis regarding the activities of the first few years.

#### **5. Background analysis**

##### *Geopolitical analysis*

Despite much progress in terms of the downfall of corrupt, authoritarian, one-party and military regimes and the growth of new democracies, more than one third of the world's population live under authoritarian rule. Threats to democracy and freedom of expression are manifested through restrictions on freedom of association and assembly, censorship and Internet filtering, surveillance and detention of bloggers, surveillance and persecution of political dissidents, undue restrictions on freedom of the media, obstacles to the collection of information about violations of human rights, corruption, etc.

In many areas these threats to democracy and freedom of expression are augmented by armed conflicts and religious clashes, fundamentalism and intolerance. Conversely, threats to democracy and freedom of expression often give rise to armed conflicts and hostility.

Disregard for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and freedom of expression entails great risks and danger for individual human rights defenders.

The Government's Communication 'Freedom from Oppression' calls attention to the fact that support to human rights defenders and publicity

from the surrounding world may be crucial for bringing about necessary changes in a democratic direction.

### *Results analysis*

Generally speaking, it can often be problematic to measure the results of initiatives aimed at influencing political processes, since outcomes are affected by several variables.

As can be seen from the above-mentioned Government Communication, Sida's analyses of its experiences show relatively high levels of achievement of its overall objectives to promote respect for individual human rights and democratic development, although they admit that measurement problems are considerable. The Communication states that the promotion of respect for civil rights and support to civil society and the media and the development of the rule of law have produced tangible results. Knowledge about political, social and cultural realities is often necessary for support to democratic processes and the redistribution of power and influence among different groups in society and can lead to support being directed at strategic actors for change. This knowledge should include both formal and informal power structures and values, and should observe, for example, how legal systems and extreme religious interpretations have led to intolerance and abuse of freedom of expression, primarily affecting women and girls.

### *Risk analysis*

Initiatives involving democracy and freedom of expression are sensitive areas because they challenge authoritarian, often strong power groups that use violence to retain control over economic resources and political influence. Great emphasis should be given to minimising the risks to private individuals receiving support in their work for democracy and freedom of expression.

One type of risk is also that taken by the financier when supporting non-established actors and frequently unproven methods. The risk is generally considered to be greater in initiatives that require urgent intervention than for those aspects of activities that are directed at more long-term measures.

A further risk is that the use of the allocated funds is hindered because of long administrative times for individual initiatives.

One way of reducing risks in administration is to make use of experiences gained from previous Swedish support to dissidents, among other groups, and to consult with other actors who have experience of similar initiatives, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). All in all, it is considered that the risk taken by introducing this initiative is well-balanced, calculated and motivated in the light of the Government's ambition for Sweden to be a key, active player in international work for democracy and freedom of expression.

## **6. Strategic considerations**

Despite progress in certain areas, totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, and religious fundamentalism present major threats to democracy and freedom of expression. In many parts of the world, people's demands for rights and

freedom continue to be brutally repressed and women and men working for democracy are exposed to violence, abuse and harassment.

In view of this, it has been important for Sweden to provide broad, multifaceted support to democratisation processes, both national and international. This new strategy will strengthen these efforts.

Through its well-developed, long-standing work for democracy and the protection of freedom of expression, Sweden is well equipped to vigorously defend and promote these rights in a global perspective.

These activities are linked to, and can contribute to strengthening compliance with international conventions concerning human rights, democracy and the rule of law as well as the applicable frameworks within the UN, the EU and the Council of Europe. They will also strengthen policies and initiatives directed at strengthening democracy and freedom of expression.

As stated above, experience from the EU, via the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, 'Enhancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in countries and regions where they are most at risk', will also be of strategic importance. This will provide guidance concerning thematic and geographical direction and support via various actors for change to strengthen democratisation and freedom of expression.