

## **Nordic-African Foreign Ministers Meeting 7.6.2018 Copenhagen**

There is a long tradition of strong partnerships between the Nordics and African countries.

Finland and Nigeria have been asked to launch the discussion on youth, which I am more than happy to do. 'Investing in Youth' was an overarching theme when African and European Heads of State and Government met at the AU-EU Summit in November last year.

Both parties stressed the importance of working collectively to support education, skills development, job creation, entrepreneurship, mobility and access to markets and youth participation at every level.

It is indeed a high time for these discussions. How can we, the Nordics and the African countries collectively contribute to realizing the full potential of the youth? Also taking into account the fact that while Africa's young population is growing the population pyramid has turned upside down in the Nordic countries. What concrete ways are there to create decent jobs for everybody? How can we cooperate in boosting job creation in a sustainable manner, also to give impetus to the decisions of the AU-EU Summit?

One thing is worrying. It seems that the lack of economic and social opportunities for the youth may be leading to a cynical view on politics. This is something that we, as politicians, should carefully follow.

Of course, democratic participation can take many forms. Still I find it somewhat alarming that many young people in the Nordic countries have turned their back to politics. They participate less in elections than the overall population. The turnout is lowest among the youth in their early twenties. I would be interested in hearing your views on this topic, and also whether this correlates with African experience.

I would now like to draw your attention to some specific issues:

First, peace and security: We face the threat of terrorism and radicalization. These problems are often linked to youth unemployment and perceived lack of opportunities. I feel strongly about this issue and I wish to do my own share. Therefore, last year I started a campaign in schools – whereby I try to explain how

we can counter violent extremism through foreign and security policy tools, such as promoting human rights and development. It has been a rewarding experience.

Second, many young Africans nowadays depart for dangerous journeys because of lack of future prospects in their home countries. Huge investments would be needed in the countries of origin to provide the youth opportunities at home. Irregular migration is on no-one's interest. It gives an upper hand to human smugglers and traffickers who have no shame in exploiting the others– often young Africans – on the move.

Thirdly, I want to raise an issue that is very important to the Nordic countries and also close to my heart: the rights of women and girls. Too often equality is just a word, without sufficient content. Women might have a formal right to education, vote and property – and yet too often in practice these rights are not being respected. This is something I think we all still need to focus on.

Finally, the global order and its fundamental values are being contested. This is why I would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to the origins of this meeting: the former Foreign Minister of Sweden, H.E. Anna Lindh convened the first meeting in 2001 to discuss the joint agenda of the Nordic and African countries, based on shared values and interests.

In 2018, this task is more pertinent than ever. The mankind is facing immense challenges such as climate change, underdevelopment and once again, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. All of these menaces can be tackled through effective multilateralism only. New global partnerships need to be formed, new alliances created, to support rules-based international order.

In this task I believe the Nordic and African countries are natural allies. We need to be able to show that answers to these problems can be found by working together and by respecting – not breaching – the jointly agreed rules.

Despite the many challenges there is hope. If we work together, we can make a difference.

Thank you for your attention.