



**Global Consultations on International Protection
Regional Resettlement Meeting
“Resettlement as a Multi-faceted Protection Tool and
its Relationship to Migration”
Oslo, 6-7 November 2001**

Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, for this opportunity to present a few reflections on the exchange of knowledge on integration, on links between countries and experts, as well as on refugee involvement.

Sweden has a resettlement programme which started some 50 years ago. We have a lot of experience in integrating refugees into our society. We have in fact been integrating into one another's communities from many kinds of angles and perspectives during all these years. And in the course of these decades refugees have transformed Sweden into a country characterised by cultural and ethnic diversity. More than 900,000 people currently living in Sweden were born in another country. Of these, 40 % have lived in Sweden for more than 20 years. A further 700,000 were born here and have roots in another country through at least one of their parents. Of course all this did not come easily. Big changes in the structure of the population is not easy. When the huge influx of Bosnians came to Sweden in the mid 90's, xenophobic parties were in Parliament, and we suddenly had a considerable number of young people joining Nazi organisations. We had a political climate we never thought Sweden would encounter. We know integration can be difficult, we know the importance of giving integration relevant and sufficient resources and we have some rather terrible experiences of what happens if you don't decide to tackle these issues with multi-faceted measures from the Government and NGOs. We also know that integration is a question of time. You know it is true what Lavinia Limon, Director General, Office of Refugee Resettlement in Washington DC, said in Geneva, that there is always something wrong with every new group of refugees that come. And after some 4-5 years people realise they are just like all of us. What happened in the meantime is usually an adaptation from both sides. You need to get used to one another.



It is really good to hear this from countries with more experience in integrating refugees than yourself. It is a comfort when you are struggling with issues of xenophobia and discrimination (hidden or open) and when it is hard to realise what is stated in our integration policy-bill to the parliament, that “the diversity generates a creative force and carries a promise of pluralistic developments in society and cultural life.”

I think Sweden is beginning to realise this now. Today there is a change in the public opinion; when the influx has calmed down considerably, the xenophobic party is no longer in Parliament, when the major news about Nazi organisations is the support-based organisations for those who quit, and when the media concentrates on the poor capacity of immigration bureaucracy.

And we have an awakening awareness of the demographic structure of Sweden. We have started to ask ourselves who is really going to pay our pensions. All of a sudden influential journalists and essayists are talking of the need to adopt an immigration policy in Sweden with an open attitude to the needs of the workforce in order to fill important gaps. We have open minds about that, as Sweden once experienced a huge emigration which has certainly been fruitful both for North America and for Sweden. Many did come back and have started very successful companies in Sweden upon which we have built our prosperity.

We don't really know all the true causes and effects of the inputs from Governments and NGOs on integration, but we do know that all over the world a massive change in the structure of a population is a large challenge (in modern history) for many of our countries and that the inputs, the knowledge, and the exchange of knowledge is of utmost importance to be able to continue resettlement as a tool of international protection and a durable solution.

The Swedish integration model has won some prestigious prizes here in Europe. Among others, the German Berthelman prize and we are proud of that. We are also proud that Sweden has a well established reputation internationally in all kinds of work related to human rights. We do have a good health care system to take care of traumatised refugees and refugees with handicaps or other special needs and we certainly take our share of these refugees. We also



have a well established organisation for the introduction period and reasonably good control of how the money flows in these huge systems. And we are willing to share these experiences with other countries who are willing to learn. We do not think that resettlement can stay within existing resettlement countries only. Other solutions in other parts of the world - preferably regional solutions - are important to encourage. This is where the new emerging countries come in. And this is why the issue of cooperation and links with these countries is of importance even for the Swedish Government.

During the process and the realisation of ICRIRR, the International Conference for the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees, we had unique possibilities to involve the emerging countries in resettlement and to create links with representatives from these countries. This was very much part of the ICRIRR concept and objective. It was a very democratic procedure in which these countries were also involved. They were suddenly here among us and many links were truly established.

And here is the point: Do not underestimate the value of these face to face meetings. It is at this level that grey facts turn to colourful knowledge, that an interest turns to desire. You need these kinds of links for support in starting up something new. I think it is true what William Glasser, a prominent psychologist, said: You learn 5% of what you hear, 10% of what you see, 20% of what you see and hear, 50% of what we discuss, 75% of what we experience and 95% of what we teach to others.

Let me compare this with what is going on in the European Union (EU) at the moment. All candidate countries in Eastern Europe are at this very minute involved in hundreds of EU funded twinning projects with current member states. They target everything from agricultural, financial and human needs issues.

In migration, integration and minority policies there are a couple of twinning projects and in every one of these, 10 candidate countries. With colleagues from France, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands, we have very fruitful cooperation in all eastern Europe apart from parts of the former-Yugoslavia. This is all funded through the EU Commission. Millions of EURO are spent on these projects for the simple reason that the EU Commission believes in



this concept, in “hands on” knowledge on what it is all about and in the links that emerge between colleagues at the practitioner level and higher up in the hierarchy for support during both initial and forthcoming processes of migration and integration.

I myself am involved in twinning projects with Hungary and Romania. The Hungarians have visited Sweden in different groups from both the Government and the NGO sectors and they have seen reception centres, detention centres, language schools – they have seen with their own eyes that we have 12 nationalities in the same classroom – seen that the head of the integration office in the local government has a Roma background. They have seen the attitudes and relations among refugees and social workers and decision-makers. They have seen that we struggle with the same kinds of problems. You need to see that you are not unique in failing.

Sweden and Denmark have sent Pre Aquis Advisors based for 6-12 months in Budapest and Bucharest to help them get started. To help them with everything from what kind of computer programmes you need to run an asylum procedure, how to run a detention centre, etc. It is also a question of teaching staff who never did more than obey orders that you are allowed to (have to) talk to the asylum seekers and the refugees. To give their kids a gentle stroke on their heads. It is very much about attitudes between people but finally even legislation, integration policies and minority policies, all aiming at getting a satisfactory system and solutions on migration and integration to be able to join the EU eventually.

We tell them about our good examples. We tell them about the Simba-Diploma for instance: Simba is an organisation lead by two young African women who help other African women to find jobs. Simba is Swahili and means lioness. It is the lioness that brings the food to the home and feeds the family. That is the background to the name of the organisation. Today a Simba-Diploma is a diploma that employers trust. The aim of these two women who started the organisation was to beat the public job center and they have distanced them by far. They started with funds from EU’s Goal 3 together with the Industry Ministry in 1998. During the first year, 80 African women participated from throughout the larger Stockholm area. During 6 months they went into school classes on information technology, Swedish, accountancy, social competence



and how to find a job. The majority of these women have today a job on which they are self-sufficient. This is far better than the results of the public job centers.

Refugee participation is also growing in all kinds of sectors. We can report from the African-Swedish organisation which has been very successful in getting youngsters and adolescents back from the streets and into meaningful meetings and hobbies and schoolwork often together. Now, one of these groups has started the production of their own newspaper.

I must say also that old countries run into ruts and face different problems. Sweden has a lot to learn as well and we certainly are going to use those links that ICRIRR gave us to help us solve these problems. Sweden is not an immigration country. We are an emigration country. Immigration countries like the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand have after all more experience. These are countries built almost completely on immigration. And this has been recent. In fact the US has their largest influx today and not centuries ago. I don't think many Europeans really know this.

In fact these countries are built on the full belief in the advantages of diversity. They have known for years - what we are finally realising - that a diverse group is better prepared to solve problems than a homogeneous one. They have known for years that diversity generates a creative force and carries a promise of pluralistic developments - in society and cultural life. We would not have believed this if it hadn't been for some countries showing us the way. We might have been stuck in the assimilation policy era and have never understood the advantages of the two-way street. We would not fully have understood that a patronising attitude is counter-productive in that it implicitly categorises refugees as outsiders, regarding them as inferior to others. Rather, we have learnt that refugees really integrate themselves and that it is up to the public, private and community sectors to work alongside refugees as facilitators to create this environment in which people can be empowered. Some of these key principles are subtle and all new resettlement countries seem to jump into the same wrong conclusions.



I dare say the Nordic countries (maybe apart from Denmark) until now have not quite seen the point in involving NGOs in our daily integration work. In all EU twinning and PHARE projects there is a lot of emphasis put on NGO participation. And we have read this over and over again but very little action has been seen until now. The Nordic countries are top heavy. We have a huge public sector running the reception and integration programs and this is partly - at least in Sweden – due to the constitution and change does not come easily.

ICRIRR taught us a lot. I think we are starting to realise the importance of NGOs, that even a shabby old NGO affiliate with a diversified staff in a distant suburb has qualities in terms of warmth and openness and feelings of belonging that a corridor in a posh civic centre open 9-5 never has or never will have. I like the introductory words of the preamble of the Conference as key principles: You can't feel grounded until you belong. You can't belong until you're accepted.

Anyway, Sweden is now acting and we have decided to twin together with the US, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to learn “hands on” approaches at the practitioners level and see how some countries involve NGOs in their integration work.

The same thing is happening on the issue of building ethnic networks and getting refugee participation. We have already established contacts with the US and the UK.

We also have to learn more about micro-enterprise projects and refugee participation and we will include this in our twinning projects with the US, Canada, the Netherlands and the UK.

In relation to the resettlement of refugees through UNHCR, the same kind of cooperation and links could be very useful to enhance integration in new and old resettlement countries. Of course Sweden could also help on a very practical level in the resettlement work. I am positive that it would be worthwhile if for instance someone from the Swedish Migration Board would lead or at least co-lead a Chilean selection mission to Rafha. It takes some funding to do this



INTEGRATIONSVERKET

Erik Stenström

but you have to agree that solutions like this must be quite something. In fact I would love to join them.

I or anyone of my colleagues on the Swedish Integration Board could help to prepare refugees for their new settlement, to set realistic expectations for reception and integration. I think this support could mean a lot and I would love to do it in the near future.

Erik Stenström
Legal Counsellor
Swedish Integration Board