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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Reports submitted in accordance with Council resolution
1988 (LX) by States Parties to the Covenant concerning
rights covered by articles 10 to 12

SWEDEN

[12 December 1979]

I. ARTICLE 10 OF THE COVENANT

A. Protection of the family

1. As regards the protection of the family and the assistance given to families, reference is first made to the enclosed leaflet entitled "Financial assistance to families with children" (appendix 1). This leaflet deals with those parts of Swedish social legislation which are aimed at alleviating the economic difficulties encountered by many families with children.

Certain further improvements of the benefits granted under the relevant legislation have been decided upon and will become effective as from 1 January 1980. These improvements include an extension of the right to obtain parent's allowance and special parent's allowance as well as the enactment of rules which give pregnant women, who are unable to continue their normal work, the right to obtain other work, where this is possible, or otherwise to obtain parent's allowance.

2. According to the Swedish Marriage Code, a marriage must always be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses.

3. One main principle of modern Swedish family law is that each adult person who wishes to live together with another person of the opposite sex shall have a free choice between getting married and living together with that person without marriage. For that reason, most of the benefits which the law accords to married couples are also accorded to couples who, without being married, are living together in a permanent relationship.

4. Swedish family law is based on the principle of equality between men and women. It contains rules about the responsibility for the maintenance of the family, the property of the spouses and a "period of reflection" before a divorce is granted. Special public services are available to give help and advice to spouses and other couples who have marital or other problems, the purpose being to protect the family from being dissolved.

5. On 1 July 1979 new legislation regarding the obligation to pay maintenance allowance entered into force. The new law emphasizes the responsibility of both spouses for the family, the home and the children. During the marriage, both spouses shall provide for their joint as well as for their personal needs. After the dissolution of the marriage, the main rule is that each spouse shall only provide for his or her own maintenance.

6. The taxation system in Sweden also takes into account the family situation of the tax-payer.

In certain cases, there is a right to an income deduction or to a tax reduction. In this regard, reference is made to the leaflet "Financial assistance to families with children" (appendix 1), pages 5-6.

It may be added that an income deduction is also granted to a person who pays maintenance allowance for a child not living at his or her home, provided that the child is under 18 or, if the child goes to school, under 21, the maximum deduction being 3,000 Swedish crowns per child.

B. Maternity

Maternity benefits are granted under the compulsory public parental insurance. As regards these benefits, reference is made to the leaflet "Financial assistance to families with children" (appendix 1), pages 6-16.

C. Protection of children and young persons

1. Protection of children and young persons in working life is provided by the 1977 Work Environment Act. A leaflet regarding this legislation is enclosed (appendix 2). Reference is made, in particular, to pages 15-16 and 44-45 of the leaflet.

The purpose of the provisions of the Work Environment Act as regards children and young persons is to prevent them from being employed in work which would be prejudicial to their health and development.

The Work Environment Act is supplemented by a Work Environment Ordinance enacted by the Government and by regulations issued by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health. As regards the employment of minors such regulations were issued by the Board in 1978.

The Work Environment Act is applicable to every activity in which an employee carries out work for an employer. Exceptions are made only in respect of service on board ships and work done in the home of the employer.

The text of the Work Environment Act is contained in the leaflet entitled "Swedish Legislation on the Working Environment" (appendix 2). The provisions regarding the employment of young persons are to be found in chapter 5 of that Act. Any person who has not attained the age of 18 years is regarded as a young person under the Act. In respect of young persons, chapter 5 deals with the minimum age for employment which is normally 16 years, protection against the employment of young persons in dangerous work, medical control as well as working hours and nightly rest. The relevant parts of the supplementary regulations issued in 1978 by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health are also enclosed (appendix 3).

Section 3 of chapter 5 of the Work Environment Act provides that the employer shall ensure that young persons are not employed in any manner which entails a risk of accident or over-exertion or any other form of harmful effect on their health or development. The second paragraph of that section authorizes the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health to regulate employments which are considered particularly dangerous for young persons. Such regulations shall concern the conditions for, or a total prohibition against, young persons being engaged in work entailing a substantial risk of accidents or over-exertion or of any other harmful effect on their health or development.

There is also an Ordinance issued by the Government in 1966 which prohibits the use of young persons for certain types of work. This Ordinance enumerates the types of work which are prohibited for young persons or in which young persons may only be employed on certain conditions. The Ordinance will remain in force until the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health has issued equivalent provisions. It is expected that such provisions will be issued in 1980.

2. As regards young persons working on board ships, there are special provisions in the 1973 Seaman's Act, the 1970 Act on Working Hours at Sea and the 1965 Act on Safety on board Ships. Section 4 of chapter 9 of the last-mentioned Act provides that the master of the ship shall ensure, in particular, that young persons employed on ships shall not be exposed to risks of accidents or over-exertion, or to any other harmful effect on their health or corporal development. In connexion with these provisions, the National Maritime Board has issued regulations in 1973, which prohibit the employment of young persons in certain kinds of work or which make such employment subject to certain conditions.

In regard to work on board ships, young persons are protected by provisions on minimum age in the Seaman's Act, on dangerous work in the Act on Safety on board Ships and on working hours and nightly rest in the Act on Working Hours at Sea. The possibility and the desirability of adopting the legislation on persons working at sea to the provisions of the Work Environment Act are being studied at the present time.

3. As regards work in the home of the employer, the 1970 Act on Working Hours etc. in Domestic Work is applicable. This Act contains provisions relating to the work of young persons and aimed at protecting them from dangers and at regulating their working hours and nightly rest. Section 8 of the Act provides that the employer shall take all necessary measures to prevent employees from being exposed to ill-health or accidents and that he shall ensure, in particular, that an employee under the age of 18 years shall not be used for work entailing risks of accidents or over-exertion or any other harmful effect on the health and development of the employee.

4. Certain statistical figures on the employment of minors are enclosed (appendix 4).

5. In the course of the last years, Swedish family law has been revised to enhance the protection of children and young persons.

As from 1 January 1977, the terms "child born in wedlock" and "child born out of wedlock" no longer appear in Swedish law. On the whole, the same rules apply to all children, irrespective of their birth. For instance, all children - whether their parents are, or have been, married to one another or not - have the same right to inherit property from their parents or from other relatives. They also have the same right to be financially supported by both parents. The right of a child to obtain Swedish citizenship, if one of the parents is a Swedish citizen, has been extended.

As regards the custody of children, the main rule in Swedish law is that, if the child's mother is unmarried when the child is born, she alone will have custody of the child. However, as from 1 January 1977, it is possible for unmarried and divorced parents to obtain joint custody of their children, whether or not the parents live together. If the parents do not agree on joint custody and if each of the parents wishes to have custody alone, it is the task of the court to decide on the custody in view of what it considers to be in the best interest of the child. The law itself does not give any general preference in regard to custody to either the mother or the father.

6. When one of the parents, who does not have custody of the child, is obliged to pay a maintenance allowance for the child, the other parent who has the custody may obtain an advance payment of the allowance from public means. The parent from whom the allowance is due will then have to make good the payment. The reason for this system is that a child should not be prejudiced by the failure or the inability of one of its parents to pay maintenance allowances, and the amount of the advance payments together with the general child allowance (see the leaflet "Financial assistance to families with children", appendix 1, p. 1) is such as to ensure that the basic needs of the child will be satisfied. The system is further described in the leaflet "Financial assistance to families with children" (appendix 1, pp. 3-4).

As from 1 July 1979 the right to obtain an advance payment of a maintenance allowance also exists in regard to children who are under the custody of both parents, provided that the parents do not live together.

7. A government Commission called the Commission on Children's Rights is now engaged in reviewing the provisions of Swedish law regarding custody of children, the right of access to children and certain enforcement measures in regard to children. According to its terms of reference, the Commission shall examine, inter alia, the possibilities of strengthening further the rights of the child itself in matters of custody. In this context, the Commission will also examine the question as to how the interests of the child can be best represented and defended, for instance through a special Children's Ombudsman or any other person specifically entrusted with this task.

II. ARTICLE 11 OF THE COVENANT

A. General

1. Generally speaking, it can be said that the population in Sweden enjoys not only an adequate, but a high, standard of living. The average income is high, there is a fairly even distribution of wealth and income and the social welfare system is well developed. Any person who is unable to provide for his own basic needs will receive financial or other support from the competent social welfare agencies.

There are also a number of social benefits which are granted to all persons of a certain category, irrespective of their financial situation, for instance old-age pension and child allowance. A survey of social benefits in Sweden is given in the enclosed leaflet, entitled "Social Security in Sweden" (appendix 5).

2. The parents of a child are both obliged to contribute, according to their means and capacity, to the maintenance of the child. At the same time, however, each parent has the right to reserve a certain minimum amount for his or her own maintenance and, in certain circumstances, for the maintenance of other family members, and he or she can only be ordered to use a possible surplus for the maintenance of a child who is not a member of his or her family. Such a child is, however, guaranteed the necessary means for its subsistence by way of advance payments of maintenance allowances and the general child allowance.

B. Right to food

1. It is a principle of Swedish agricultural, nutritional and social policy that all persons in Sweden shall be guaranteed sufficient food. Agricultural production shall be such as to ensure to everyone high quality food at reasonable prices.

Another element of Swedish policy in this field is the desire to achieve an equitable distribution of resources between the different parts of Sweden. Persons employed in agricultural work in all parts of Sweden shall be guaranteed an economic and social standard comparable to that of other comparable groups.

2. During the 1950s, the Swedish Parliament adopted several decisions aimed at promoting Swedish agriculture. Subsequently, an important decision was taken in 1977. According to that decision, there shall be an effective utilization of Sweden's natural resources for the purpose of promoting agricultural production. By utilizing the resources in a rational manner, Sweden's own nutritional needs can be provided for, and it will even be possible for Sweden to contribute to satisfying the nutritional needs in other parts of the world.

3. The Swedish State grants substantial subsidies to agricultural enterprises in order to assist in making them more effective. Primarily, these subsidies take the form of loan guarantees. Special subsidies are granted to agriculture in northern Sweden, where climatic conditions are particularly difficult. Such subsidies may be granted in respect of all kinds of agricultural enterprises - cultivation as well as cattle-breeding. Similarly, subsidies are also given to horticulture.

Agricultural and horticultural research is mainly carried out at the Swedish University of Agriculture. This university has three faculties - one agricultural research faculty, one veterinary-medical faculty and one forestry research faculty.

The research activities are mainly financed by the State. The State also supports agricultural development work in other ways, inter alia, through the State Council for Forestry and Agricultural Research.

Another public body - the State Agency for Machine Tests - examines new agricultural and horticultural machines and equipment. The results of such examinations are forwarded to the farmer concerned and to other interested persons.

The University of Agriculture has a special department which is responsible for forwarding research results to advisers, teachers and interested farmers. Comprehensive consultative activities for the benefit of farmers are conducted by public authorities in the field of agriculture. In all parts of Sweden, experts on economics, cultivation, cattle, horticulture etc. are available as advisers.

4. State subsidies intended to make agriculture and horticulture more effective are also given in respect of measures for soil improvement and for the establishment of irrigation systems.

In Sweden, measures are also taken to protect farmers against damage to crops. This particular scheme is financed jointly by the farmers themselves (one third) and by the State (two thirds).

5. The network of roads and communications is well developed in Sweden. Consequently, there are no difficulties in distributing agricultural and horticultural products to all inhabitants in all parts of the country.

6. In order to keep prices of certain basic food products (among others, milk, cheese, meat, pork, flour and bread) at a low level, the State grants subsidies amounting at the present time to 3,600 million Swedish crowns. The purpose of these subsidies is to improve the living conditions of, in particular, families with children and old people.

7. The present Swedish food legislation dates from 1972. It is based on two main ideas - to provide protection and help. The purpose is:

To protect consumers against harmful, infecticous or otherwise unusable food-stuffs; and

To help consumers to form an opinion on food products and to choose the most suitable products within the large assortment available.

In order to serve this purpose rules have been established, which cover the whole road of the product from producer to consumer and which indicate how food-stuffs are to be produced, packed, marked, declared, handled, served etc. A State agency called the National Food Administration has been since 1972 the central body which is responsible for these questions. The task of the National Food Administration is to safeguard the interests of consumers in this field. The actual control of food-stuffs, however, is carried out by the Boards of Health. The administration of each province is responsible - through the official veterinarian of that province - for co-ordination of food-stuff control within the province. The National Food Administration is also responsible for meat control. All meat has to be controlled by the supervisors of the National Food Administration.

In regard to many important food-stuffs, the National Food Administration has laid down certain standards with which food-stuffs have to comply before they may be sold under a certain name or designation. The consumer is thereby guaranteed a certain minimum quality of the food-stuffs concerned.

C. Right to adequate clothing

On this point, it should be sufficient to point out that the needs of the population in Sweden in respect of clothing are entirely satisfied, partly through production in Sweden and partly through imports from other countries. There is no scarcity of clothes in any part of the country, and the social welfare system is such as to guarantee that no person in Sweden lacks adequate clothing.

D. Right to housing

1. As a general observation, it can first be pointed out that Swedish housing policy is intended to benefit the whole population in all parts of the country. In particular, this appears from the methods used for providing capital to the construction of houses. Almost all construction of multifamily houses is financed by loans from the State.

The fact that the housing policy is meant to benefit the whole population does not exclude that special benefits, such as housing allowances (see the leaflet "Financial assistance to families with children", appendix 1, pp. 2-3) can be given to certain categories of people who have a weak economy, for instance families with children.

2. Certain statistical figures on housing construction, State loans and subsidies are given in the attached information sheet, entitled "1979 Swedish housing" (appendix 6). The basic elements of Swedish housing policy also appear from the publication "Towards a new Swedish housing policy" (appendix 7).

3. On a biannual basis, the Swedish Government submits reports on current trends and policies in the field of housing, building and planning to the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning of the Economic Commission for Europe. Since these reports contain a great deal of important information regarding Swedish housing policy, the last two reports, which were submitted in 1976 and 1978, are enclosed herewith (appendices 8 and 9). The next report will presumably be submitted in the summer of 1980.

4. In connexion with the Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, which was held at Vancouver in 1976, a number of reports on the building and housing situation in Sweden were drawn up. Although these reports are already available to the United Nations, copies of them are enclosed herewith (appendices 10-14).

III. ARTICLE 12 OF THE COVENANT

1. The Swedish system of public health is described in the annexed leaflet, entitled "The Organization of Medical Care in Sweden" (appendix 15).

2. In addition to the information contained in that leaflet, the following facts may be of interest.

In the spring of 1979, the National Board of Health and Welfare presented a draft programme for the medical care of mothers and children. This programme is meant to provide guidelines for the public bodies which are responsible for providing medical care.

According to the draft programme, the principal aims of the system of medical care for mothers and children are said to be:

To reduce mortality, diseases and handicaps among future mothers or mothers of small children, as well as among pre-school children;

To reduce any harmful strain on parents and children;

To support and activate parents in their roles as parents and thereby to create favourable conditions for the all-round development of children.

/...

The contemplated activities will include preparations for parenthood, providing advice to young people on birth control, teaching to parents, providing information on sexual matters and on children's development.

3. In 1979 a law was adopted in Sweden, according to which children must not be subjected to corporal punishment or to any other degrading treatment.

4. In 1978, the 1977 Work Environment Act entered into force (cf. above). This Act is intended to ensure that workplaces are healthy and safe. For this purpose, safety committees consisting of representatives of the employer and of the employees shall be set up at every workplace where 50 or more persons are regularly employed, or at workplaces with a smaller number of employees, if the employees so require.

The safety committees shall plan and supervise safety work at the place of employment. Their work includes protection against ill-health and accidents and matters concerning occupational health service.

5. Medical care in Sweden is subject to regular planning for certain periods. The present planning extends to 1985.

Between 1977 and 1981 the number of visits to a doctor in Sweden is expected to increase from 18.1 million to 21.9 million, which is equal to an increase from 2.2 to 2.6 per inhabitant. The share of visits to doctors who are not in hospitals is expected to increase during the same period from 41 to 46 per cent.

According to the prognosis, there will be an increased share of visits to doctors which concern general medical care. This share is expected to increase during the period 1977-1981 from 36 to 39 per cent.

As regards specialist care, so-called doctors' stations and medical care centres are frequented to an increasing degree. An increase from 8 to 11.5 per cent is foreseen during the said period.

The plans for hospital development indicate an increase in the number of beds for long-term somatic care and a reduction of the number of beds for short-term somatic treatment and, in particular, for psychiatric treatment. The changes in regard to the total number of beds are expected to be about 1 per cent per year during the period 1977-1981.

As regards long-term somatic treatment, the number of beds will be increased, according to the plans, by 8,300, i.e. from 41,300 beds in 1977 to 49,600 beds in 1981. This means that the number of beds per 1,000 inhabitants of more than 70 years of age will increase from 48 to 53. When evaluating the increase in the number of beds, it is necessary also to take into account developments in regard to other forms of treatment, for instance treatment in the patient's home. The number of persons employed in long-term medical care is estimated to be 46,000 in 1981.

As regards short-term treatment, it is estimated that the number of beds will be reduced from 43,300 in 1977 to 42,800 in 1981. The number of persons employed in 1981 is estimated at 114,000.

In regard to psychiatric care, it is believed that the number of beds can be reduced from 21,190 in 1977 to 20,800 in 1981. The number of persons employed in 1981 is estimated at 27,800.

6. The following statistical figures regarding Sweden may be added.

In 1977, 9.0 boys and 7.1 girls out of 1,000 children died during the first year of their lives. In the age group 1-4 years, the corresponding figures were 0.5 boys and 0.3 girls, and in the age group 5-9 years the figures were 0.3 boys and 0.2 girls.

The number of doctors in Sweden was 9,034 in 1978. The number of beds in hospitals and similar institutions was 119,246 in the public sector and 12,100 in the private sector.

List of reference material annexed to the report*

1. Leaflet entitled "Financial assistance to families with children"
2. Leaflet entitled "Swedish Legislation on the Working Environment"
3. Supplementary regulations issued in 1978 by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health - Excerpts
4. Statistical figures on the employment of minors
5. Leaflet entitled "Social Security in Sweden"
6. Information sheet entitled "1979 Swedish housing"
7. Publication entitled "Towards a new Swedish housing policy"
8. Report by the Swedish Government to the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning of the Economic Commission for Europe, 1976
9. Report by the Swedish Government to the Committee on Housing, Building and Planning of the Economic Commission for Europe, 1978
10. Report entitled "PLAN - International HABITAT 76"
11. Publication entitled "Building for Everyone"
12. Publication entitled Swedish Experiences of Self-Building Co-operation Consumer Research Participation
13. Publication entitled Water in Human Settlements
14. Publication entitled Land Policy in Sweden
15. Leaflet entitled "The Organization of Medical Care in Sweden"

* These documents are available for consultation in the files of the Secretariat in their original language as received from the Government of Sweden.