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“transparent and efficient justice”
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SPEECH

Ms Beatrice ASK, Minister of Justice
SWEDEN

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

My compliments to Minister Ergin and Turkey for preparing and hosting this conference. Even if it is easy to fall in love with the city of Istanbul, we all know that this type of arrangements only can take place after a lot of work. Thank you for all those efforts and for your hospitality.

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be here today. I am very glad to be given the possibility to address issues that are of great importance to all of us.

The citizens and their confidence in the legal system is a cornerstone in all states governed by law. It is of great importance that the judicial system can meet the expectations from the citizens on being efficient and legally secure, regardless of whether the citizen is a crime victim, a suspect or a claimant in a civil case. This must be the focus of our attention. In my view, fundamental values are the most important issues in the area of justice. But, politics has to deal with structures and practical challenges too. They go hand in hand with values.

It is time for policy-makers to think about different ways to make better use of modern information technology also in the justice area. Obviously, Turkey has taken important steps and that is impressive.

The Swedish government has during recent years made a dedicated effort to make the judicial system more efficient. Among those measures are improved crime investigation and more appropriate court proceedings. An important part in this work is to use modern information technology in the field of justice. Modern information technology offer great opportunities to our courts need to be a part of this development.

The resolution No. 1 on a modern, transparent and efficient justice underlines the importance of Information and Communication Technologies as a mean to modernise justice systems and facilitate international co-operation. In Sweden we fully share this view. This is, inter alia, reflected in one of our recent reforms “More modern court proceedings” as well as in the on-going work to enhance the use of Information and Communication Technologies within and between the judicial authorities.

The reform “More modern court proceedings” was introduced in Sweden two years ago. It brought major changes in the procedural rules governing legal proceedings, particularly in district courts and courts of appeal.

Today, all testimonies given in the district courts are recorded on video. The videotaped statements of the witnesses and parties are then used in the courts of appeal.

From a citizen perspective, the video recordings mean that victims and witnesses in many cases do not need to come to the Court of Appeal and make a statement once more. This will put less strain on the persons who are to be heard and may also reduce the costs of legal proceedings.

The reform also introduced general rules on videoconferences for application in all courts. By videoconference, we mean when someone participates in a trial from a separate location by video link. A majority of the courts in Sweden are equipped with a videoconference system as well as the vast majority of Prosecution Authorities and the Prison and Probation Service.

Parties, witnesses and others who are to participate in a court session may now be able to participate from a distance by videoconference when appropriate.

The possibility to use videoconference enhances the accessibility to courts and makes it easier to plan and hold trials and other hearings. This also contributes to lessening the number of cancelled court hearings.

The videoconference system is also important from an international perspective. There is an increasing need to hear witnesses that are situated in another country.

The reform has been into force for two years and is now about to be evaluated. I think the international link will be used more frequently. It saves time and money.

Another important national project is the development of Information Systems for the Law Enforcement Community.

Under supervision of the Swedish Ministry of Justice an extensive work is in progress to establish an electronic exchange of information in criminal cases. The project involves the main authorities in the judicial system but also the Swedish Tax Agency and the Swedish Customs as well as the National Council for Crime Prevention and the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority.

By 2012, the goal is to have an electronic case flow all the way from the report to the police to executed sentence. I hope we will manage to realise this according to plan.

An electronic case flow will improve the speed and the quality of the procedures and thereby strengthen the rule of law. An electronic case flow will also improve service to all citizens who come in contact with the judicial system.

Furthermore it will facilitate a more efficient use of resources. It will be possible to obtain knowledge on how to improve the work within the judicial system.

In the long run this work is expected to lead to higher cost efficiency, primarily through lesser administration and quicker procedure. The time saved could for example be used to put more police on the streets to prevent crime, and for investigation and legal proceedings for crime already committed.

Later, another important topic will be discussed during this conference, "Prisons in today's Europe". I would like to conclude my remarks by reminding us all of the fact, that one of our most important challenges is to prevent people from entering into criminality and also to use efficient methods to enhance a successful re-entry into society of those who have served their sentences.

By using and exchanging knowledge we can get better use of the resources that we put in to the criminal justice system. Therefore I am happy to remind you of the Stockholm Prize in Criminology which this year will be awarded to Robert Sampson and John Laub for their research showing how criminals stop offending. And I want to invite you all to the next Stockholm Criminology Symposium and the price award ceremony that will take place in Stockholm the 13th to 15th of June 2011.

Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to our continued discussion.