

Nordic Countries Advance Cooperation on SDGs

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On 3 November 2016, Prime Ministers from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden discussed how the Nordic Region can cooperate on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), at the 68th Session of the Nordic Council. Speakers highlighted gender equality and women's empowerment, and the region's potential to serve as a leading example in achieving the SDGs.

The Nordic Council is the inter-parliamentary body of the four countries and Iceland. The Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland islands also participate in the Council.

Speakers at the 68th session, which convened in Copenhagen, Denmark, from 1-3 November 2016, called for the region to take a leading role in achieving the SDGs. They particularly highlighted the Nordic welfare system as a model for others.

Sweden's Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven, said the strength of the Nordic welfare system and the region's equal societies "inspire others" and have made the region "the most competitive and integrated" in the world. Finland's Prime Minister, Juha Sipilä suggested that the Nordic welfare model "should be an export product," and can be a contribution to reaching the SDGs. The Faroe Islands Prime Minister, Aksel Vilhelmsen Johannesen, described the Nordic social model as the epitome of sustainable development, emphasizing the region's respect for human rights, low levels of corruption and promotion of equality and democracy.

On women, Sipilä, called for redoubling efforts to achieve SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), noting that not even the Nordic countries have met the SDG 5 targets. Norway's Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, also supported focusing on gender equality.

On other SDGs, Denmark's Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, highlighted the importance of SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all). Prime Ministers also addressed SDGs on climate, energy and the environment.

Nordic Council President Henrik Dam Kristensen said the Prime Ministers' debate on the SDGs marked "the beginning of an increased effort to put SDG's on the political agenda" and ensure the SDGs become a reality in the region and in the world.

The Nordic Council appointed Sonja Mandt, Norway, to lead a working group on a more sustainable, prosperous and equal future in the Nordic region and globally. The Council also discussed accountability, and noted its determination to push Nordic governments to implement the SDGs over the next 15 years.

The Council addressed a number of other issues, including peace and security and the

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refugee crisis. The Council welcomed Sweden's place on the UN Security Council (UNSC). Margot Wallström, Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs, said Sweden will work to benefit women, peace and security in its role on the UNSC.

The Council awarded its Environment Prize to the creators of an app, 'Too Good to Go,' that aims to change how consumers and businesses approach food waste and resource consumption.