

**Speaking points ASEAN CSR Network's conference on Corporate Governance & Responsibility: Theory meets practice. 20 July, Singapore**

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Environment and Water Resources, Excellences, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

1. I'm much honored to participate in this important conference and for the opportunity for Sweden to contribute to the discussion of sustainable business conduct within ASEAN. Sustainable Business is an area the Swedish government puts increased efforts into and sustainability is integrated in our trade- and export strategy. In 2015 Sweden launched as the sixth country in the world, a National Action Plan, for implementation of the **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights**. The increased ambition level was further announced with a new Policy for Sustainable Business.
  - The Swedish Government's clear expectation is that businesses respect human rights in all their activities in Sweden and abroad and have international guidelines as a starting point for their work. Gender equality, children's rights perspective, diversity, business ethics and taxation are important aspects. Businesses should promote freedom of association contribute and counteract all forms of discrimination and exploitation, and contribute to gender equality.
  - Sweden is also preparing for a mandatory reporting requirement in line with the EU directive on non-financial disclosure. This will mean that companies with more than

250 employees will need to disclose information covering the business' sustainability policy, risk assessment and mitigation, and results of the policies.

2. In addition, the Swedish Government encourages the business community to analyze Agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals, and contribute to areas relevant in relation to their business operations. Businesses in the forefront of CSR are important drivers of change in many areas that are of priority in Sweden and for Swedish foreign policy. The proactive contribution by businesses – has potentially large impact on the future global challenges and on the development in ASEAN, in many areas:
  - Poverty reduction through inclusion of small scale businesses and farmers in value chains, and operations,
  - Gender equality; Women's strengthened economic empowerment and opportunities to decent work: Companies have an important role to play in setting standards and changing norms; how well are women represented in your companies' top managements for example? And how can we strive towards more equal treatment when it comes to parental leave?
  - Reduced inequalities; through higher wages and inclusion.
  - Decent work; workplaces and employment conditions on equal terms that are respecting international human rights, Strengthening the social dialogue and relations between parties on the labor market.
  - Climate change challenge and deteriorating biodiversity; reducing impacts through innovations,

- Fighting corruption.
  - We are convinced that companies contribute a major part in development; to poverty reduction and solving problems, and can do even more if looking into how their core business can strategically fit with vulnerable groups' needs, generating mutual benefits for the business and for their surroundings.
  - I would also like to highlight the importance of the media and their role in scrutinizing the companies and follow up that they really deliver what they say in their reports.
3. We can many times be proud of many Swedish companies in the forefront – and we continuously encourage Swedish businesses to be role models.
  4. On the Global Goals we would like to highlight that 30 of the Swedish largest businesses have formed a joint initiative together with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – SIDA, a commitment to work together to contribute to the Global Development Goals. The companies under this initiative – the *Swedish Leadership for Sustainable Development* – have agreed to systematically minimize negative environmental impact, and create higher efficiency in resource use, create decent jobs, and to fight corruption and unethical business methods. In addition, they committed to promote gender equality and equal opportunities for all, as fundamental necessities for systemic change.
  5. We are happy to see that collaboration on implementing a regional strategy is on the agenda. We see the growing importance of such common agenda, effort and vision for responsible business within ASEAN Economic Community – as

response to cross-border challenges in human rights and environmental and climate challenges. Joint work by both companies and states in the forefront in this area is both possible and important. Research in the area, into what makes a successful and sustainable business, also plays crucial role. ASEAN with its countries are in a good position to develop regional collaboration between actors and networks that you all represent.

6. Again, we are pleased to be contributing to regional collaboration and efforts, and look much forward to continue to follow the work by the Network and all your partners.
7. A final highlight: Through our regional development cooperation in Asia, managed out of Bangkok, we continuously seek partnerships with businesses. For example – partnership projects have been initiated between H&M, Sida and the International Labor Organization (ILO) to promote decent employment and social dialogue in Cambodia, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Ethiopia. So what's in it for the company in this case? Good industrial relations with functioning trade unions means stable business relations, increased effectiveness and reliability in production. Social dialogue is amongst the areas we plan to support increasingly. We welcome any ideas for cooperation, in this or other areas.
8. To conclude: and this is important for all of us engaged in the issues that will be discussed today –CSR is god for business and ultimately for the shareholders.

Thank You!