

Words of Welcome by Pierre Schori at the *Olof Palme Prize* ceremony, on the 30th of January 2017, in the Swedish Parliament, Stockholm, Sweden.

Dear friends,

A warm welcome to all of you to this 28th Annual Award Ceremony of the Olof Palme Prize. A special welcome to Lisbet Palme and family, and to our guests of honour, *Spyridon Galinos* and *Giusi Nicolini*.

We are happy to see the Swedish government represented by the deputy foreign minister Annika Söder. We welcome former prime minister Ingvar Carlsson, the President of the City Council of Stockholm, Eva-Louise Erlandsson Slorach, the president of Stockholm's Human Rights Council, Sissela Nordling Blanco, the Metropolitan of Sweden and all Scandinavia, Cleopas Strongylis, and former Palme Prize awardees Kurdo Baksi and Hans Blix.

We greet the diplomatic corps and Kenneth Forslund, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee and other representatives of the Swedish Parliament, as well as of the European Commission and European Parliament, trade unions and solidarity groups, academia and think tanks, media and publishing houses, cultural workers and artists, private sector and church leaders, peace and human rights activists, the UN family with UNDP and the Swedish UN association, the ILO, SIPRI and International IDEA, the Fair Trade Movement, The Right Livelihood Foundation and Amnesty International, and no less than three officers of *the Swedish Coast Guard*, Sofia Bergström, Fredrik Köster and Karolina Fehn, who with their vessels and crews have rescued more than 5 100 people in Italian and Greek waters, assisted by Rear Admiral Kenneth Neijnes, Commander Robert Primus, Lieutenant Filip Lilja and other crew members present here today.

Present also are students from *Kristofferskolan* in Bromma with their teacher Kerstin Brüggemann, who has worked with refugees in Lesvos. And we thank Bicky Chakraborty for his constant support to the Memorial Fund.

Today, Olof Palme would have celebrated his 90ieth birthday. We gather here in the old Parliament building, where he spent much time as an MP. You can see his name on this wall to my right, next to that of former foreign minister Lena Hjelm-Wallén, who is also here today, as well as former deputy UN SG Jan Eliasson.

This month Sweden began its two-year period in the United Nations Security Council. It is an important and difficult challenge in a particularly turbulent and unpredictable time.

For Olof Palme, who tried to participate as prime minister every year in the work of the world organization, this challenge would have been welcome and inspiring. His concept of détente through common security, trade, culture, diplomacy and people to people relations are elements sadly missing in today's world of confrontation, xenophobia, occupation, terror, erosion of human rights, and in which a Trump version of ethnic and religious cleansing confronts decency and international laws.

We feel confident that the Swedish government will be that *independent and globally committed actor* in the Council as it has pledged. Prime minister Stefan Löfven, in his first policy declaration, underlined that commitment when he said *No to Nato membership* and *Yes to a Palestinian state*.

The wars and terror in the wider Middle East and Afghanistan, and the conflicts and degrading human condition in many parts of Africa have caused an unprecedented flow of refugees and asylum seekers. Thus, extreme focus has been put on one of the most fundamental of human rights, the right to seek asylum. "Europe has

failed to implement a collective, managed response to the challenges posed by the arrival of over a million refugees and migrants”, said **Filippi Grandi**, the new UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Many islands and coastal towns have been the goal of asylum seekers in the **Mediterranean** and the **Aegean Sea**. All over people rallied to assist the refugees. Because of their geographic location two islands, Lampedusa and Lesvos, have become the centres of humanitarian action.

Over the last three years more than 500 000 asylum seekers landed in **Italy**, partly due to the chaos of civil war in Libya in 2016, they were a record-high 180 000 and 15 000 of them were unaccompanied children. 2016 was also the deadliest year on record on the Mediterranean with more than 5,000 deaths recorded.

Over the last two decades, 400,000 migrants landed on the tiny island of **Lampedusa**, closer to Tunisia than Sicily or mainland Italy. During my visit to Lampedusa last December, mayor **Nicolini** took me to follow the work of the Italian **Coast Guard**. Italy insists upon continuing search and rescue operations and not to focus on stopping new arrivals. On the coast guard radio, we heard another death reported from a rescue vessel. On a wall in Lampedusa I saw a graffiti ”Proteggere le persone non i confini”. (Protect people not borders).

Two weeks ago the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), praised the rescue, by the Italian Coastguard in coordination with EU’s Frontex, over three days, of some 1,500 people from boats struggling in rough, cold weather.

The UNHCR has at the same time reminded EU countries of the continued, urgent need to help resolve the situation in **Greece** through relocations of asylum-seekers to other Member States. Total arrivals in Greece last year was 173,447. On 6 Jan 2017, Filippo Grandi ✓ @RefugeesChief twittered the following: *In 2015 the EU agreed to*

relocate 66,400 refugees from Greece. Less than 8000 have been relocated. Not an example of responsibility sharing.

Mytilini, the capital of Lesbos, has a population of about 90,000, yet saw almost 450,000 refugees pass through during 2015. In December I met with the Mayor Galinos, with local civil society organizations such as *Mosaik and Lesbos Solidarity*, and with representatives of international humanitarian organizations, Caritas, Médecins sans Frontières, SOS Children's Villages in the locally administrated *Kara Tepe* refugee center with 3 000 inhabitants. On a nearby wall I saw another graffiti "No human is illegal".

Several Swedish non-profit organizations, such as *Lighthouse Relief* and *We Do What We Can*, and hundreds of Swedish volunteers have given their direct support on Lesbos and in other places. Some of them are present here today and we salute them.

When Olof Palme, in 1965, first addressed the issue of refugees, immigration to Sweden numbered 400 000, of which 150 000 were refugees from World War II. Two decades later, between 1985 and 1995, another 400 000 came to seek asylum, mainly from the wars in former Yugoslavia.

Twenty years later, in 2015, a record-high 163 000 persons fled to Sweden, up from 81 000 in 2014. Thus, in the last three years, more than 250 000 people, homeless because of wars and misery, sought asylum in our country.

Today, more than ever, the refugee drama has become a common European concern, first and foremost for the war refugees themselves who had to flee from family, home and country, from their history and everyday life.

At first, solidarity in most European countries was swift and strong, but with time, as wars and terror continued unabated, some people started to react against "the flow of immigrants". This resulted in

scenes of chaos at borders, leading to a breakdown in the public's trust in the capacity of governments and local institutions to manage the situation and playing into the hands of those who wanted to turn refugees into scapegoats.

But civil society, local authorities and private citizens struggled on.

What we have learnt, or what we should have learnt, is that also stable welfare societies can be shaken and even damaged by sudden and unexpected shocks. Another important lesson is that we need to mobilise and engage not only authorities and voluntary organizations, but the force of citizen action, for the sake of our own cohesion *and* for solidarity and future challenges.

Carsten Jensen, the Danish writer who got the Palme Prize in 2009, reminded us recently that the word *consciousness*, *samvete* in Swedish and Danish, literally means *sharing knowledge*, *samvete*. This "shared knowledge", this "consciousness", is both a method and a hope. It can best be achieved and rooted in the public mind through public schools, where you learn from each other and become citizens. "In a democracy the class room is a school of consciousness and the strongest bastion of civilization. It is there where a new world order can begin", Jensen states.

Last year, the Palme Prize awardee of 2011, Italian writer *Roberto Saviano*, noted in commemorative text: "We must look up to Olof Palme's lesson when we cope with the flows of migrants that seek asylum today: a policy of tolerance, of welcoming practices and inclusion. It is not a matter of choosing the right side of the barricade, it is a matter of tearing down the barricades". And Saviano added: In his famous political treatise 'The Prince' Machiavelli wrote: 'to build new castles means only new sieges'. It was in the year 1513", underlines Saviano.

And yet, to our dismay, today in the year of 2017, such an offensive wall is to be built against Mexico. But even a Trump castle would be an insecure and traumatizing enterprise.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With this year's Prize and ceremony we want to honour compassionate action in a time when suffering is enormous, causes of asylum overwhelming and solidarity more needed than ever. When we underline the need for international solidarity, the humanistic imperative, we do not deny the legality of borders and nation states, but we focus on fellow human beings in acute need and on our role in this "Greek" drama.

Therefore:

The 2016 Olof Palme Prize is awarded to the two mayors Spyridon Galinos, Lesbos, and Giusi Nicolini, Lampedusa and Linosa, for their inspiring leadership in one of the most difficult periods of our time, thereby having saved thousands of lives and given hope and belief in the future.

Together with their citizens Spyridon Galinos and Giusi Nicolini opened their minds and societies for fellow human beings fleeing from war, terror, and misery. In an increasingly dangerous and cruel world they have stressed the humanistic imperative that it is more important to protect people than borders.