

**Mr Christer Hallerby, State Secretary, Sweden**

Mr Chairman, Secretary General, ladies and gentlemen,

(Thank you for your kind words of introduction and welcome.)

It is an honour for me to be here today, representing the present chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. I am also representing the link between last year's Forum Meeting in Stockholm/Sigtuna and this meeting here in Madrid.

Forum for the Future of Democracy is, in my view, a very important process. It provides a platform for strengthening democracy and good governance. Its potential lies within its flexible working methods, the possibility to identify relevant themes and the broad participation from both within and outside the Council of Europe.

The Forum is an inclusive process. It associates all main stakeholders of a genuine democratic society. The Forum is a good example on how the institutions within the Council of Europe can give new energy to the work for making participatory and inclusive democracy even stronger. I am very much looking forward to this Forum session.

I am happy to say that the meeting in Stockholm, except for the weather, was a great success. I think we met high expectations with an interesting content, well organized process and challenging conclusions. And this also means that we in our turn have expectations for the continuation of

the Forum process. I am sure that the Spanish hosts are well prepared to carry out this event to everyone's satisfaction.

The theme of the session in Sweden 2007 was Power and Empowerment – the Interdependence of democracy and human rights.

Human rights define some of the basic parameters for democratic governance. There cannot be true democracy without human rights, and for democracy to develop– in its turn – it is necessary to protect and promote human rights.

The session addressed issues such as the role and responsibility of the opposition, representative democracy at local and regional level, empowerment of the individual and non-discrimination, respect for freedom of expression and association for civil society, and how to fostering democracy, human rights and social networks.

As mentioned in Sigtuna, national human rights action plans could be a tool for identifying problems and weak areas regarding human rights and democracy. I am happy to be able to share with you that there will be an international follow-up conference on systematic work with Human rights in Stockholm 6 – 7 November.

It was also concluded that different actors, such as NGOs and national human rights institutions, should be involved in all such processes at an early stage and on a regular basis. This is of course also of significant

importance in improving the processes of accountability in a country's democratic system, for example its electoral system.

The forum in Sigtuna referred to issues concerning increased citizen participation in decision making. There was interesting discussions on how to involve people in decision making between elections, and how to involve and develop the civil society.

The follow-up process is extremely important. We would like to express our appreciation to Spain as the session here aim to further developing on the process from Stockholm/Sigtuna last year.

As addressed at the Forum last year, Information and communication technologies can be a powerful tool for the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy. They have the potential to create more transparent and responsive government and to facilitate a participatory democracy.

E-governance policies, embedded in an appropriate regulatory framework, should enhance democracy. Also the respect for human rights with a view to empowering all individuals, in particular those in vulnerable situations, need to be underlined.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that increased participation will not be brought about simply as a consequence of progress in information and communication technologies. If such technologies are to facilitate the empowerment and participation of individuals, the growing

feeling of political discontent and disaffection among people must be addressed.

I am convinced that these concerns will be successfully and further developed here in Madrid.

Thank you for the chance to express these optimistic thoughts.