

Speech by Laila Freivalds, at the 35th Ordinary Congress of the Swedish Social Democratic Party in Malmö, 29 October – 3 November 2005

Party friends,

In the words of Olof Palme, politics is a question of will. Politics is the will to change.

We are a party in favour of change. We react to injustice but we do not stop at protesting. We become involved, we work together – and we make changes. Against us we always have the Right that fears change and development. The Social Democratic government now faces a challenge from a right wing pact, in a new dress, that wants to role back our reforms and achievements also in the field of foreign policy.

The new international program, which we discuss today, expresses our vision of foreign policy. In the week gone, Fredrik Reinfeldt, the right wing pact's candidate for the post of prime minister, presented his vision. It contains lots of fine words and a lot we could support, because in this field, as in so many others, the Right has abandoned its own policies and history on the rubbish tip of history and has instead chosen a position close to our policy. Or is that really the case? When you look more closely at Reinfeldt's words, what you see is an empty rhetoric on foreign policy and false mathematics on foreign aid.

We Social Democrats can be proud of the history of our foreign policy. Party members and trade unionists have always opposed oppression regardless of whether it has been called Nazism, fascism, communism, colonialism or apartheid. Even at the risk of personal liberty – or their own lives. It is a question of respect for human rights and international law.

Our unbending belief in the equal value of every person is also the reason why we developed a modern development and aid policy. It is a question of justice.

And when repression or poverty forces people to flee, as was the case after the military coup in Chile, or after the civil war in Somalia, then they have been able to find asylum in Sweden. I will meet here at this congress with representatives from Katrineholm who have fled from the war in Somalia. I myself came here as a refugee from a country attacked by Nazis, on its way to being occupied by communists. We managed to find a small apartment with an outdoor toilet in Uppsala, but we were safe and could begin to build a new future here. It is a question of solidarity.

Things hang together: the political struggle, the struggle against poverty and the reception of refugees; foreign policy, development aid and the policy on migration are three means to achieve the same goal; international law, justice and solidarity. This is the core of our social democratic foreign policy.

This is where we differ:

International law is the foundation for our view on the conflict in the Middle East. Reinfeldt

on the contrary does not mention with a single word the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. He does not mention our criticism of the barrier on the grounds of International law: the wall and the electrified fence on Palestinian ground. Remember when we made our criticism of the invasion of Iraq on the basis of international law, a war which now more than half of all Americans are opposed to. Then the liberal party, besides taking up the issues of a language tests for immigrants, systems of informers in schools and prison sentences for 14 year olds, also demanded that Swedish troops be sent to Iraq.

International law in our eyes is strongly related to our view of security policy. For us, a UN mandate is important for Swedish troops to take part in armed conflicts. Reinfeldt appears to see this more as a hinder. For him, cooperation with NATO is the most important issue. We want to see more Swedish soldiers in international missions. But do the moderates wish them to do this under a UN flag, or will it perhaps be mostly NATO troops when it comes to the crunch?

And how will a government led by the moderates be able to contribute to a question which for decades has been a central issue for Sweden, namely the question of international disarmament, which the UN-summit failed to resolve? How will Reinfeldt at the same time work for being included under the nuclear protection of NATO, and convince other countries that nuclear weapons must be abolished?

Friends,

International law would not be a guiding principle for a government led by the moderates. It is perhaps for this reason that Reinfeldt does not mention the word International law in his foreign policy speech.

Justice is the foundation for our policy to strongly increase foreign aid and to reach the one percent goal. Justice is the foundation of our work within the UN and the EU for increased aid. The moderates will instead remove over 6 billions crowns from the foreign aid budget next year. What is it that Reinfeldt want Sweden to stop doing in the field of foreign aid? Shall we cease to combat HIV/aids in Southern Africa? Shall we cut out emergency aid to those who are suffering in Pakistan or in Dafur? Is it the support for democracies given to those suffering oppression that should be cut out? Or shall we stop working to strengthen the rights of women to decide over their own lives?

And then the moderates want military actions to be financed with foreign aid money. On the basis of the moderates' false mathematics, the invasion of Iraq will turn into a gigantic foreign aid effort, not to mention the Russian foreign aid effort in Chechnya, or the Israeli aid in the occupied territories.

Friends,

Justice would not be important for a government led by the moderates. This is perhaps the reason why Reinfeldt in his foreign policy speech did not use the word justice one single time.

Finally, we have the question of solidarity. We Social Democrats supported the political struggle against apartheid in Southern Africa at the same time as we received freedom fighters in Sweden and developed our foreign aid to the liberated countries. This is how we

have worked in Latin America, and in Indo-China. There is a clear red line of solidarity running through our history right up to our foreign policy today. We can be proud of what we have stood for. The Right on the other hand will not admit their cowardliness on the issue of apartheid, on the war in Vietnam, or on the military coup in Chile. This is why it is empty rhetoric when Reinfeldt says that our voice in foreign policy has become silent. This is what the Right has always wanted. They squirmed when Olof Palme sharpened his tone on Vietnam in the 1970s, when Maj-Britt Theorin warned against nuclear weapons in the 1980s, when Anna Lindh spoke out on the Middle East in the 1990s and when Göran Persson clearly spoke his mind on the invasion of Iraq in our new century.

But we will never keep quiet because we see that it is worth while to speak out and because we must speak out. We are a party in favour of change and development. For this reason we say to the Byelorussian, the Burmese, the North Korean, and the Zimbabwean people: We stand on your side. For this reason we say to the refugees in Darfur, in West Sahara and in the Middle East that we will not forget you. For this reason we say to the oppressors in the world: We will never keep quiet. Our sense of solidarity forbids us to do so.

Friends,

Solidarity would never be the basis for a government led by moderates. I am certain that it is for this reason that Reinfeldt in his speech on foreign policy never used the word solidarity once.

But we do! In our political guide-lines, in our new international program. Everything we do on our daily political activities throughout our movement in local party associations, in Social Democratic municipal organisation and the government is based on solidarity, justice and International law!

This is the way we build up a foreign policy for change. This is the way we build bridges to the future.