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04.2001
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**Statement by Ms Kristina Rennerstedt, Under-Secretary of State,
Ministry of Justice, Sweden**

Mr (Madam) President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I address the congress for the first time I would like to join in the long line of congratulations, Mr (Madam) President, on your appointment. I would also like to congratulate the conference.

As have been said before, the increase in transnational organized crime as well as traditional criminality is a challenge, not only for individual states, but also for the international community, which is why we must jointly decide on how to meet that challenge.

One of the most important ways in which we jointly can cooperate to fight this threat is by actively supporting the elaboration of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the three additional protocols. Stressing the importance of the convention, the scope of its application must be wide and it must be possible to render effective mutual legal assistance on the basis of the convention.

To achieve success in the fight against international crime it is also essential that states rapidly implement and put into practice agreed instruments, such as the applicable conventions, and utilise the already existing room for cooperation in national law more effectively. I am convinced that a lot can be achieved under existing arrangements, if developments are boosted by a genuine political will for progress. This has clearly been demonstrated by the work undertaken in the Baltic Sea Task Force against organised crime, to use an example from my own region.

United Nations efforts to combat crime are not confined to crimes of a transnational nature. Co-operation within the United Nations also provides a valuable forum for an exchange of experience on methods to prevent and fight crime at the national level. We are all pressingly aware that traditional law enforcement activities alone are not sufficient to counter the criminality that constitutes a serious threat to the quality of life of our citizens and to the well-being of our societies. We must take steps to prevent crime from occurring in the first place. All parts of society must be involved in crime preventive efforts, whether to reduce the opportunities to commit crime or to prevent the development of individuals' propensity to commit crime when the opportunity is given. Obviously there are links between crime and unsatisfactory social conditions. Equality in standard of living, integrity and equality between men and women are important factors also from a criminal policy perspective. To prevent and reduce crime, we have to recognize the necessity of measures also in that respect.

The treatment of offenders is another aspect of crime prevention. Sanctions should be designed to give offenders the possibility to refrain from crime in the future, and special consideration should be given to the treatment of young offenders. Where a traditional prison sentence can not be avoided, the sentence should be served under conditions that are in conformity with human rights. Although we should not always expect immediate results, it is highly important that imprisonment is combined with measures that are designed to minimise the risk of recidivism.

The United Nations has made considerable and important efforts to promote more humane treatment of prisoners, but there are still many countries in which prison conditions are far from acceptable and I doubt if there is any country that can claim that there is no scope for improvement. It is not only a question of money. An attitude of decency and humanity is of equal importance. Regrettably, even torture and other forms of inhuman treatment are still occurring. We consider that the United Nations should

continue to give high priority to the treatment of prisoners and particularly to find means to create respect for the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. I note also with great disappointment that the use of the death penalty has increased rather than decreased in recent years. This is unacceptable and should be actively resisted, as every death sentence represents an act of disrespect for the most fundamental human right: the right to life. The global abolition of the death penalty is a task, no, a duty of overriding importance for all those of us working for a humane crime policy.

The victims of crime are sometimes made hostages to the harsh and inhumane treatment of offenders, as this is sometimes justified by claiming that it provides the victims of crime redress, not to use the word retribution. We reject this idea. Crime victims can not obtain redress as the result of new injustice committed in their names, which is a lesson we apparently must learn repeatedly. In order to resist such demands for revenge, we must, however, improve our support to those who become victims of criminal acts. This is an area where a considerable development has taken place, including here in the United Nations, and it is important to continue these efforts.

Punishment and victim support are, no matter how humane and effective, still signs of failure - failure to prevent crimes from happening, which is the main message I would like to convey. Our prime ambition should be to prevent members of society from ever becoming victims of crime. We all know that we will never be able to completely eliminate crime, but the best must never become the enemy of the good and this must not stop us from making every effort within our power to achieve this goal. This Congress is an important contribution in that direction and I hope and trust that it will be successful in working towards that goal.

In summing up, Mr (Mme) President, I would like to underline the necessity of elaborating a modern criminal policy based upon a balance