

How does Your Excellency see the Jordanian-Swedish relations?

I am very enthusiastic about Jordanian-Swedish relations. There is a positive image of Sweden here in Jordan and many Jordanians are curious about Sweden and Swedish experiences. In Sweden, there is a rising interest for the Middle East, in particular to understand better the challenges for the region. Also, we have a growing community of citizens with roots in the Arab world. Jordan plays an important role in the region and there is huge interest from all sides of Swedish society to visit, learn and meet Jordanians. Of course, Jordan with all its many historical sites is also a popular tourist destination, in particular during the winter season in Europe.

What are the efforts provided by Your Excellency to enhance the Jordanian Swedish relations further?

There are already a lot of contacts between Sweden and Jordan in all fields; at the political level, in business, in education and culture and between different organizations for example those working for human rights and gender equality. The Embassy often plays the role as intermediary or facilitator to enhance relations further. As Ambassador, I am the matchmaker that puts people and/or organizations together.

The Embassy also works actively to promote Sweden through our public diplomacy channels. It is important for us to communicate what is happening in Sweden and what Sweden is doing here in Jordan and in the region. For example, we want to give the Jordanian audience a perspective on priorities in Sweden's foreign policy; such as gender equality, sustainable development and human rights. We try to reach as many Jordanians as possible through the Embassy's Facebook and I myself am active on Twitter. Reaching young Jordanians is important to us – if they form a relationship with Sweden when they are young they will help us promote relations in the future.

How can the economic and business relations be developed between the two countries?

Jordan and Sweden do business in a number of fields including health care, natural resources, telecommunications and retail. I am of course pleased that one of Sweden's most well-known brands, IKEA, opened its store here in Amman last year. This investment has created 400 new jobs in Jordan. I would also like to highlight Jordan's role as a trading centre for the rest of

the region. Swedish exports to Jordan currently stand at around 70.5m JOD per year, which I believe is a healthy figure given the challenging regional economic climate. However, I think more can be done in finding synergies in fields where both Sweden and Jordan are at the forefront, such as the ICT sector for example.

On the global level, Sweden is a supporter for free and fair trade. We believe that the WTO must be strengthened as an organization and we attach great importance to the Doha Round. For Jordan, we support the negotiations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTAs), which would enhance trade relations with Jordan with the entire EU.

What is Sweden's role in development cooperation in Jordan the MENA region?

Sweden has a long standing commitment to the MENA region in the field of development cooperation. Sweden does not have a bilateral development cooperation agreement with Jordan. However, Jordan is part of our regional strategy where we focus on three main areas: human rights and democratic governance, sustainable use of transboundary water resources and regional economic integration. Sweden works with regional NGOs as well as international and regional institutions to support developments in these areas. Annually, these programs amount to 40m JOD. We believe that this regional approach creates synergies across different countries which often share the same challenges.

Given current developments in the region, Sweden is in the process of reviewing our development strategies. We have identified the need to put a separate focus on the consequences of the Syria crisis and to develop a parallel approach to the rest of MENA region.

Finally, I would like to stress Sweden's active participation in European Union dialogue and cooperation with Jordan. The European Union including its member states is Jordan's third largest development partner with approximately 1.1 billion JOD grants annually. Sweden is also contributing 10m JOD to the World Bank's special program to support host communities here in Jordan and in Lebanon.

What is the current state of migration to Sweden from the region?

A key function of the Embassy of Sweden in Amman is the processing of visa applications for Jordanians, Syrians and Iraqis who want to visit Sweden for business, studies or tourism. But the Embassy also plays an important role in receiving applicants for reunification with family members in Sweden. Since the start of the Syrian conflict, over 65 000 Syrians have arrived at our borders to seek asylum. The majority of people coming for interviews at the Embassy are family members of Syrian asylum seekers who have been granted residency in Sweden.

How do you see political developments in the region?

The MENA region is indeed going through turbulent times. We all feel outraged over the ongoing conflicts and the increased level of violence at all levels of society. At the same time the Arab world consists of a young, resourceful and tolerant population with enormous potential. So many children and young people are suffering not only from the conflicts but also from poverty and lack of education and job opportunities. This situation risk becoming a breeding ground for extremism and radicalization, where we all have to join efforts and work preventively. There is definitely a need for more platforms for young people to engage with politicians on issues that matters to them and for their voices to be heard. In this regard, I think it is important not to forget what started the Arab Spring and the popular uprisings; a unifying call from people around the region for dignity, for democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Why did Sweden recognize Palestine and what does Sweden hope to achieve?

Over 20 years have passed since the Oslo Agreement. Since then, we cannot say that much progress has been achieved. Palestine remains occupied. A two state solution has been undermined by Israeli settlement expansion, suspended peace negotiations, and recurring violence. Sweden recognized the State of Palestine in the hope that negotiations stand a better chance to succeed if conducted between two less unequal partners. I believe the Swedish recognition has contributed to putting the spotlight on the fact that there is no status quo. Developments on the ground remain alarming with a high level of violence. There is a need to isolate extremists on all sides. Still, we need to give people in the region hope that peace is possible.

The Swedish recognition of Palestine is complemented by an additional development cooperation package of approximately **141 million JD** over a five year period specifically in support of Palestinian state building. It focuses on democracy, human rights and gender equality; environment, climate and emergency preparedness; and private sector development.

What kind of support does Sweden provide to Jordan to face the consequences of the Syrian crisis?

Like Jordan and the wider international community, Sweden is actively supporting efforts to enable a political solution of the Syrian conflict, which is key to resolving also the regional refugee crisis. We all recognize Jordan's enormous efforts in hosting over 600 000 Syrian refugees. Within the EU, my country has received the highest number of Syrian asylum seekers per capita; over 65 000 since 2011. In this context, Sweden always stresses the importance of a global solidarity and burden sharing in receiving people fleeing war and persecution.

The Syrian refugee crisis is a tragedy of enormous proportions and it has implications for the entire region. Our solidarity with people fleeing the wars extends also to our humanitarian support. Sweden is among 10 top donors globally and remains one of the largest donors to the Syria regional refugee response (50 mJD in 2014). In Jordan and Lebanon we are also contributing to programs that support the host communities that have been most affected by the refugee crisis.

What is Sweden's feminist foreign policy and how is it relevant to the Arab world?

As Sweden's Ambassador to Jordan, I am particularly proud to represent Sweden's firm belief and consistent work for gender equality. Gender equality is about equal rights and opportunities for all individuals. In fact, also men have to be fully involved. In Sweden, gender equal policies have been essential in advancing economic growth and in building our welfare state. But in most societies, also in Sweden, there is a need to strengthen women's roles, rights and influence, in order to achieve gender equality.

In fact, the full potential of an individual or a society will not be realized as long as it is denying women their rights through structural discrimination; be it by law, by culture, by

tradition or values. This is why the empowerment of women and girls is essential in promoting peace and security, human development and economic growth. And this is why the Arab world has to start advancing this agenda now, or it risks being left behind the rest of the world.

In our regional development cooperation with the gender perspective is integrated, whether we focus on human rights and democracy, on support for regional economic integration or on regional cooperation on water. We always ask ourselves relevant questions: How does this affect women? How can this project contribute to strengthening women's roles? How can this enhance men's understanding of the advantages of gender equality?