

## Sweden's position on the cause of Dag Hammarskjöld's death

### Swedish Parliamentary Exchange: 10 September 2020 (not an true record)

#### 115. Foreign Minister Ann Linde (S)

Mr President, Gudrun Brunegård has asked if I see any reason to conduct an independent survey to clarify why Sweden has so far chosen to blame the Ndola tragedy on the Swedish pilot, and if I intend, on the basis of Mathias Mossberg's report, to reconsider the current Swedish stance on the matter, opening up the possibility of external causes for the crash.

I welcome this opportunity to clarify this government's position on the issue of Dag Hammarskjöld's death along with others on board the Albertina aircraft.

Let me state that the two questions Gudrun Brunegård asks are based on incorrect assumptions.

Since 2014, our government has sought to gain clarity and has thus taken the position that an attack or threat may be possible causes for the crash.

At the same time, I would like to thank Gudrun Brunegård for raising the issue, the circumstances surrounding Dag Hammarskjöld's death. I welcome this as there is much interest in the question. For the government, it is a high priority that the matter continues to be investigated.

Since 2014, when the independent commission of inquiry determined that new evidence had emerged, the government has consistently sought to upturn every stone to ensure the UN inquiry into the cause of death proceeds. Since then, the government has many times stated that reasons other than pilot error may be at least as likely.

It is therefore wrong to talk about a complete reversal over recent years. On the contrary, the government has been pushing for clarity and the possibility of an attack causing the crash should be examined carefully. This has been pursued through a number of resolutions in the UN on Sweden's initiative, resulting in the Secretary-General appointing an independent investigator with a broad mandate to investigate the matter further.

During the course of the investigation, Sweden has on several occasions supported the investigator, clarifying through several press statements that the inquiry must move forward. It is likely that there is more information that can help this. This government has also concluded that from the conclusions of the Investigator, Mohamed Chande Othman, it is reasonable to believe that an attack or a threat caused by the crash and this should be taken very seriously.

This, the Government's current position is not that it supports the conclusion of pilot error being the cause of the plane crash. On the contrary.

In connection with the 2017 resolution, Member States were instructed to appoint special investigators to report from their national archives. Mathias Mossberg was appointed by this government to carry out this work. Mossberg was also given an additional assignment to write a report on this assignment and shed light on Sweden's handling of the case. We asked Mossberg to take on this additional assignment to search for further information on the former Swedish government's handling of the issue, through access to Swedish archives. This report, like Mathias Mossberg's other report, was carefully carried through.

We do not refer here to the point made by Brunegård that Mossberg's report refers to so-called reversals in Sweden's stance during the years 1961-1962 and 1992-1993.

I should state that this issue has been investigated already by then Ambassador Bengt Rösiö, reporting in 1993. His conclusions do not coincide with Mossberg's or of the UN investigators.

Furthermore, it may be worthwhile to note that the previous government (before 2014) chose not to seek clarity, for example, through an international UN inquiry based on new data.

As Mathias Mossberg stated in his report, there is probably nothing further to find in the Swedish archives. For this government, therefore, there appears to be little scope for implementing a further examination of the kind proposed by Brunegård.

The government has been careful to present the conclusions in a transparent manner from Mathias Mossberg's report. Among other things, we invited relatives, interested researchers and private individuals to a seminar at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the inquiry ended.

Our main priority is to focus on providing continuing support to the UN-led investigation. The government has raised the issue both nationally and internationally and maintains close links with the families of the aircraft crew and other stakeholders. We are particularly concerned that the relatives of those who tragically crashed in Ndola now 60 years ago should get as many answers as possible.

#### **116. Gudrun Brunegård (KD)**

Mr President, I would like to thank the Foreign Minister for this clarification of the government's position on the tragic plane crash in which Dag Hammarskjöld, other passengers and the crew on board Albertina died.

The Swedish people and, above all, the families of the victims, have the right after 60 years to know the truth about what happened, and why.

It is interesting that the government states that in 2014, it had taken the position that an attack or threat could be the possible cause of the crash but such issues, even if discussed in the UN General Assembly, do not always reach the Swedish population.

Nor is it a given that indirect messages give a clear impression you want to investigate new witness reports and that you have changed position.

That is why it is welcome that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, clearly addressing the Swedish Parliament, can speak about the government's willingness to clarify the real cause of the plane crash. It is good that the Swedish government supports the work carried out by the UN Secretary-General's appointed independent investigator Mohamed Chande Othman. It was therefore an important decision to appoint former ambassador Mathias Mossberg to carry out the task of searching Swedish archives for any missing pieces of the puzzle that can be found there, able to contribute to a better overall picture of what happened.

Over the years, other important documents and memoirs have also been found in private archives. One such example is the note from Hultsfred made by Major Olle Ljungkvist. He was in UN service in Congo at the time and was the one who closed the plane door on Albertina before she left on her fateful journey from Léopoldville to Ndola. The document was kept for some twenty years in the Hammarskjöld family manor farm outside Vimmerby. It was delivered to Judge Othman before his 2019 report.

Most likely, similar eyewitness reports can be found in private archives of Swedish UN veterans and in companies - Swedish and foreign - who were active in or had contacts with the mining industry in Katanga and Northern Rhodesia. All these can be significant small pieces of the puzzle that together can contribute to bringing clarity to the events.

But who is responsible for calling for these? And where to send them if you find something that might be of interest? UN Independent Investigator, Judge Othman, cannot speak Swedish, and Mathias Mossberg's assignment has ended. If Judge Othman has follow-up questions or requests additional information, to whom should he then turn? Has the government appointed a new contact person for such contacts with Judge Othman, and if so, who? These are important questions, to which I assume that the Minister for Foreign Affairs has answers.

#### **117. Foreign Minister Ann Linde (S):**

Mr President, on October 7, 2019, the latest report from Judge Othman was released. The confirms the conclusions previously drawn, that is it seems reasonable that an attack or threat may have caused the crash in Ndola in September 1961. The investigator notes at the same time that more work needs to be done and that a number of Member States have not yet provided adequate information. According to the investigator, these are principally the USA, Great Britain, Russia and

South Africa. Sweden is mentioned as one of the countries who reported in an exemplary manner and cooperated fully with the independent investigator.

I and other government representatives regularly raise the issue in contact with other countries that are particularly important in moving the process forward as well as in talks with UN representatives. The UN investigator's latest report recommended that he should be given a mandate to continue his investigations, that key Member States should extend ongoing assignments and that conclusions should enable the investigator to conclude whether Member States followed the process set out in the UN resolution and what the consequences would be if this is not the case. In light of this, the government once again initiated a new General Assembly resolution which was adopted unanimously on 27 December 2019, extending the Judge Othman's assignment.

As far as the government is concerned, we continue to follow this work closely and contribute, among other things, with contacts and technical support when required. The government has also strived for openness and transparency in our work in the issue. Among other things, government representatives have participated in interviews, and published a number of press statements since 2014, in particular in connection with the adoption of new UN resolutions. When Mathias Mossberg finished his assignment, we invited relatives, interested, researchers and private individuals to attend a seminar at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at which the investigation work and its conclusions were described in detail. The government also maintains close and regular contact with relatives of those who so tragically died in Ndola almost 60 years ago.

#### **118. Gudrun Brunegård (KD)**

Madam President, I would like to thank the Foreign Minister for her answer. But the question remains: Is there any named contact person at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who keeps in touch with Judge Othman now that Mossberg's mission has been completed? It would be interesting to know. Let me follow up another thread, the one about an independent investigation of the Swedish Government's handling of the issue. What diplomatic or commercial considerations were behind the Swedish about turn on the cause of the plane crash? This is a mystery, after the openly critical stance of the Rhodesian authorities who conducted the initial investigations, and which prompted Prime Minister Tage Erlander to declare in the Riksdag that the Rudholm working group would critically examine all information that emerged. As Mathias Mossberg puts it: 'When the working group in May 1962 delivered its report, it had reformulated and limited its mandate. It was no longer a matter of reviewing and evaluating, even less to critically examine it'.

The Rudholm working group instead announced its conclusions similar to that of Northern Rhodesia, citing pilot error. And yet, the critical reports from the Civil Aviation Administration and the National Criminal Investigation Department which could contradict this, were classified. Why?

The Foreign Minister rejects the need to investigate this, arguing that there is probably no remaining trace of information in the Swedish archives. But there well may be enough pieces of the puzzle for that image should become clearer. Mathias Mossberg notes that in his investigation, it was not in his mandate to investigate this. He writes: 'Aspects of the Swedish authorities' handling of the issue are highlighted and there have been questions concerning its position over the years but even though these issues deserve further discussion, my mission does not extend to making a complete evaluation of its handling of the issue without elucidating more important aspects of this. It has not been possible within the framework of my investigation to specify where these ambiguities and discrepancies are based.

In conclusion, it is justified for the UN to call on all Member States to make available all relevant documentation in the case and revoke any confidentiality. There is not much in Swedish archives that still is classified in this matter. Given the time that has elapsed since the events of Ndola 1961,

there are no longer any reasonable grounds for maintaining the confidentiality of materials relevant to this question.

There is thus still classified material 59 years after the incident. Why does not Mossberg have access to this? Is the Foreign Minister prepared to now relax the secrecy, to provide additional pieces of the puzzle which refer to the actions of Sweden's government at the time which obviously felt compelled to stop critically reviewing and instead to align with the interests of the Northern Rhodesian colonial power? Or did that interest outweigh reports from a long line of eyewitnesses who told of pursuing planes and bright lights in the direction of travel of the plane? This is Sweden's special concern; it is Swedish history. We must honour the request of the UN investigator and take action. His mission is to investigate circumstances into the cause of the fatal crash. The question is whether the Foreign Minister wants to participate and push for the truth to come out about the driving forces that influenced Sweden's actions almost 60 years ago and again in the early 1990s.

#### **119. Foreign Minister Ann Linde**

Madam President, Unlike the previous government, that is exactly what we have done all the time since we took office in 2014 to try to get the truth out. I maintain that the government took a robust decision when new evidence emerged. And it was clear in pushing to re-establish the investigation into the plane crash as led to the death of Dag Hammarskjöld and the crew on board Albertina. As I have said, the government has repeatedly given our support to the conclusions that the UN independent investigators have reached, and which differ from the conclusions of the original Rhodesian inquiry.

Regarding an investigation of the Swedish handling of the Swedish investigations which have been held over the years, we have, through Mathias Mossberg's report and other sources, taken note of what are described as fluctuations in the government's stance.

The government does not question this but cannot explain or confirm reasons to this. Given the circumstances that existed at the time of Dag Hammarskjöld's death, it cannot be ruled out that diplomatic and realpolitik considerations in could be an explanation. We will continue to follow this closely. Our immediate priority will be to provide support to the UN-led inquiry. The countries that still have not fulfilled their reporting needs to do so, and access to the closed archives needs to be provided.

As Mathias Mossberg stated in his report, it is probable that there are no traces of information remaining in Swedish archives. For the government thus, there appears to be a limited basis for implementing an examination as that proposed by Brunegård.

The Government has been careful to present in a transparent manner the conclusions of Mathias Mossberg. And as I have pointed out before, we have invited relatives, interested parties, researchers, and others to a seminar to discuss and present their views after Mossberg's work had been completed.

Our main priority is to continue to focus on providing support to the UN-led the investigation. The government has raised the issue both nationally and internationally and has had close contacts with the families, the aircraft crew and other stakeholders. We are particularly concerned that the relatives of those who were tragically injured in Ndola for almost 60 years ago should get as many answers as possible.

#### **120. Gudrun Brunegård (KD)**

Madam President, Thank you so far, Madam Foreign Minister!

We have obviously, as Mossberg points out, still missing classified documents here in Sweden that could shed light on what really matters, what prompted the diplomatic trade-offs that Sweden made. It surprises me that the Foreign Minister does not see that there could be a great historical interest in this and getting to the bottom of it.

My pressing for an independent working group to examine them the Swedish government's handling of the issue in 1961-1962 and 1992-1993 of Dag Hammarskjöld's death seeks to highlight further aspects. Thus, there are still Swedish classified documents despite the fact that Sweden, through UN resolutions, called on other countries to open their archives. Why has not the secret status been revoked for these? Surely Sweden should take the lead by good example and shine light on our own doorstep if there is any? We should deal with it surely after 60 years.

Although we are now impatiently waiting for the British, Belgians, French, Americans, Congolese and Zambians to open their archives and classified documents for Judge Othman's inspection, there are other relevant reports that are important pieces of the puzzle for Swedish action. Even Norway which was both involved in NATO and had UN troops in the Congo, lifted the secrecy on all documents a few years then.

When the minister says that there is nothing more to find in Swedish archives, surely an independent working group with historical and legal expertise could certainly complement the work being undertaken in several countries. I maintain that it is Sweden's responsibility to investigate the Swedish government's actions on the issue, not the UN.

### **121 Foreign Minister Ann Linde (S)**

Madam President, I place great value on Gudrun Brunegård's attention to this issue. We share the same goals and hope to get closer to the truth of what happened in Ndola almost 60 years ago. Given the international dimension of the event, the great public interest and the importance of the relatives receiving further answers, the government is determined that the Hammarskjöld case is followed up in the proper manner. At the same time, we are realistic. All we can demand is that the UN and all its Member States do all they can to find out what actually happened to airplane SE-BDY. We owe it to the families of those who passed away almost 60 years ago, to the United Nations as an organisation, and all those who today work in the spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld. Let me end with a tribute to Dag Hammarskjöld, his life and his work. As Sweden's only Secretary General of the United Nations, few other Swedes have left an imprint on international diplomacy. The debate was thus concluded.