

United Nations Association

Westminster Branch

Campaigning for a strong, credible and effective UN



The Hammarskjöld Commission Report: Ensuring a UN General Assembly debate on 15 December

News Update 1

19 November 2014

New Swedish government changes stance on death of Dag Hammarskjöld

[from *Dagens Nyheter*, 19 November – see note at end of article]

Sweden will now actively push for a review of the circumstances surrounding the death of Dag Hammarskjöld in 1961. By this move, the new government abandons the Reinfeldt administration's passive stance on the issue. "It is the obligation of the Government of Sweden to try to bring clarity," said Foreign Ministry State Secretary Annika Söder.

On 15 December, Dag Hammarskjöld's death is scheduled to be debated by the UN General Assembly. New information has been received including that which refers to the plane crash in which Hammarskjöld died. The General Assembly will decide whether the case should be re-examined and, if so, in what manner.

Dagens Nyheter understands that, earlier this year, Swedish Foreign Office documents showed that the Reinfeldt government did not intend to push for a new review. The incoming government takes a different line. Annika Söder confirms that Sweden will present a resolution when the matter is discussed by the General Assembly and speaks of the country's moral obligation. "For us it is a matter of clarity. We have way too many great men and women who have died without sufficient clarity. This is about our own countrymen who perished and also for their families. If Sweden does not take this initiative, I do not think any other country will do it." said Söder.

The question of the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld's death continues to fascinate. *Dagens Nyheter* has followed developments in pursuit of the truth. Also involved is a British lord, an archbishop and writers also have had key roles.

In September last year, the Hammarskjöld Commission comprising independent jurists presented its report with new information about the plane crash in Ndola which cost the then Secretary-General Hammarskjöld and another 15 people, including eight Swedes. It identified several classified documents, which the US National Security Agency (NSA) appears unwilling to disclose. Earlier this year, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged all UN Member States to release all relevant documents, supporting the case for re-opening the investigation. He gave three options; allowing an expert panel reviewing the new information; to open the UN inquiry from 1961-62 again; to start a new investigation.

The Swedish government is currently preparing the text of the necessary resolution. It is clear that Sweden will co-sponsor the first proposal because they believe it makes it easier to get support from other countries.

“Naturally, we could go straight to a new investigation,” said Foreign Ministry State Secretary Annika Söder “but we believe this is the way to get the most information. Also, it is not only archive data from different countries which is important but also testimonials, especially from the Africans residing at the site for the crash, which was not properly heard in the 60's.” She believes that there are good prospects that the resolution adopted by the General Assembly.

Annika Söder, the Foreign Ministry's top official, was the former head of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in Uppsala but claims the new Swedish line has nothing to do with her former position. “I followed these developments when I was working for the Foundation but we have not devoted ourselves the question of Hammarskjöld's death. However, the Foundation's mission is to manage his political legacy. This initiative has been driven by a Swedish wish for open policy making.”

The previous government had previously been criticized for failing to act to bring further clarity about the plane crash. Former Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and his colleagues have referred to the one-man inquiry conducted in 1993 which concluded that the crash was probably due to pilot error. Relatives of the victims have interpreted the Foreign Ministry's inaction to reflect its sensitivity to the opinions of other countries. However, Söder does not think that the proposed review should be seen sensitive to Sweden.

This article by Jens Littoren was published in the Swedish journal *Dagens Nyheter* on 19 November. It has been translated by HK Simensen and David Wardrop and should not be taken as an official document.

For the original, <http://www.unt.se/asikt/debatt/utred-hans-ode-nu-3450820.aspx>