

Distinguished guests, Members of the media, Dear Friends,

First and foremost, I would like to welcome everyone to Bangkok Art and Cultural Centre to attend our two concurrent events which are

- 1) the official opening of the photo exhibition by the Swedish Photographer Elin Berge called “Parenting – an equal opportunity” AND
- 2) Today we are also presenting a Paternity Leave Pledge by here on stage present Swedish- affiliated companies. The two events are interlinked and here is why.

In the exhibition that surround us here today, you will get a glimpse of the lives of parents in Sweden who strive to live equal lives, sharing the tasks of parenthood.

Sweden was the first country in the world to introduce parental leave for both mothers and fathers already in 1974. The year after in 1975 I was born, and my father was among the first Swedish dads to take this opportunity. Mostly because he was in between jobs and my mother wasn't, but still a decision that he never regretted.

Today parents are offered 480 days of parental leave. Thanks to a wide range of parental support packages not least the parental leave for both parents, Sweden has never ranked lower than place 5 among 150 countries in the Global Gender Gap Surveys. Moreover, Sweden has achieved one of the highest female employment rates in the world at 80.3 per cent. This is to be compared to the global average of 49 per cent.

When you go and look around at this photo exhibition, I hope it gives inspiration and reflection on your own life stories if not as a parent, then once as a child with your parents or care givers. I believe that balancing career and family life is something most of us can relate to. I am a father myself and I understand all too well the joys but also the struggles parents go through in raising children.

That is why I am very happy that from now on, more fathers in Thailand will be given opportunity to experience more time with their children through this Paternity Leave

Initiative and my belief is that this will be enriching and increase the understanding of all that parenthood entails.

With this we have come to the other reason for us gathering here today – the Paternity Leave Pledge by these present Swedish- affiliated companies. Thank you, all the representatives who are here with us today! Let me acknowledge the companies, in an alphabetical order - ABB, AstraZeneca, Atlas Copco, Capaciton, Electrolux, Foreo, Fitness24Seven, Global Bugs Asia, IKEA, Rapid Asia, Volvo Car and Wallander & Sson.

Giving one month paid paternity leave is not just a generous gesture, it is the right thing to do to promote gender equality. Some say it takes a village to raise a child, I believe that too. But you also need modern government policies and responsible corporates (*look at the representatives of the companies*) Thank you for showing us that the Swedish adherence to sustainable business such as the promotion of gender equality, good and decent working conditions and fair treatment of employees follows you wherever you are located in the world.

I understand that in some countries, the notion of men taking care of children could be seen as unusual and a foreign idea. However, let me remind you that a hundred years ago, the concept of universal suffrage and women's equal right to vote was also far-off as well before we enjoy the equal rights in Sweden today. I hope that you keep our mind open and really reflect on the importance of paternity leave. Together, we need to reduce the stigma surrounding paternity leave and try to normalize it.

Paternity Leave is not only beneficial for fathers, mothers and children as a result of more equitable division of household chores and increased bonds within the family, but also for the society and the country as a whole because it leads to higher female employment, narrow the gender income gap, increase GDP & productivity and strengthen the economy in general. A real win – win situation I have to say.

I hope that this pioneer initiative can inspire other organisations to consider granting any kinds of parental support not least the paternity leave and to take gender equality in the world of work seriously.
