

Principles and Policies

RFSU

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Introduction

“I dream of the day when every child that is born is welcome, when men and women are equal, and sexuality is an expression of intimacy, pleasure and tenderness.”

THESE WERE THE WORDS OF ELISE OTTESEN-JENSEN. She founded RFSU in 1933 together with a number of socially committed doctors, trade unionists and political activists. At that time, the people of Sweden had large families, were suffering from severe poverty and high unemployment, and had inadequate knowledge about sexuality and contraception. Contraceptives were in scarce supply, particularly for the poor.

Given conditions in society, it was obvious that sexual policy had to be included in a broad political program, whereby social and economic demands would be combined with demands for sexual rights. The newly formed RFSU's view of sexual policy was much wider than simply preventing unwanted pregnancies.

RFSU is still building on the foundation it laid in the 1930s. It is not possible to separate sexuality and personal relationships from the conditions under which people live. Pressure of time, illness, stress, financial difficulties and problems at work affect our scope to enjoy and take advantage of the positive power of sexuality. People with financial and social resources have greater potential to make choices and seek support in difficult situations.

Taking a holistic view on people is one of the cornerstones of RFSU's conceptual approach to its work. However,

the organisation's efforts in the fields of education, advocacy, and the promotion of public awareness and knowledge focus on issues that are connected more directly to sexuality and personal relations between people. This is a broad area, in which gender equality is an important base and a key aim.

Ultimately, the prerequisite for enjoying sexuality, and making the right decisions about it and matters concerning child birth and upbringing, is that relations between people are on an equal footing. Such equality must incorporate every aspect of life, not just sexuality. Accordingly, RFSU regards the relation of power between men and women as a key issue. At the same time, social and economic equality is also a prerequisite for changing destructive forms of behaviour and relationships in which sexuality is used as a weapon or a means of defence.

RFSU's experiences and the safety net that has been created in Sweden in the sexuality and reproduction arenas have attracted attention in other countries. Through its membership of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), RFSU has been active internationally since the formation of IPPF in 1953.

Even in its international work RFSU focuses on issues involving power and human rights, sexuality, personal relationships and prevention. Access to knowledge through

sexuality education is an important weapon in the battle against poverty – not least in the countries that are most heavily exposed to HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is paralysing large parts of the world, with countries in Africa, south of the Sahara, being hit most heavily. In some countries, 20-25 per cent of the adult population is HIV positive or suffering from AIDS. AIDS-related illnesses and deaths are resulting in increasing numbers of orphans, a decrease in years of schooling, and reduced production in agriculture and in the private and public sectors. All of this is leading to increased poverty.

Against this background, it is essential that an organisation like RFSU has contacts and collaboration partners focusing on other aspects of human life. Consequently, RFSU collaborates with many organisations and individuals whose activities mainly concentrate on areas other than sexuality – such as policy and politics, the labour market, research, cultural gatherings, and functional impairments. This is clearly reflected in RFSU's associate organisations, which represent political parties and various types of interest groups as well as organisations active in the sexual-policy field.

RFSU is a broad-based organisation, in which the activities of local branches in various parts of Sweden play an important role. Their work includes providing information, influencing public opinion, knowledge collection and method development.

RFSU also has a clinic, whose work involves sexual counselling and matters related to prevention and sexual health. Continuous knowledge and method development, and also research, are linked to these activities.

Influencing public opinion is one of the most important aspects of RFSU's work. In conducting this work, it is essential that the organisation is able to adopt an independent position, without having to worry unduly about the reactions of fund contributors. Since its inception, RFSU has owned a company that sells contraceptives, and which gives the

organisation a financial base that serves as support when independent positions have to be taken on controversial issues.

RFSU's program of ideas presents the organisation's basic views on matters related to sexuality and its role in our lives. The goals that we formulate, often in the form of demands, are all tied to this area. These are goals that can be supplemented in other contexts and sometimes by other parties – regarding, for example, demands for a shorter working day/week, good child and elderly care, and power-related issues in the political arena, working life and the business community.

RFSU's program of ideas presents our basic outlook for discussion of everything from gender-related role patterns, sexuality education, and sexual desire and enjoyment, through to abortion and pornography.

Read and let's discuss!

Sexual freedoms

SEXUALITY IN FANTASY AND ACTION, such as longing and enjoyment, is an important part of human life. Sexuality is nourished by individual freedom and openness between people.

Prerequisites for sexual freedom include knowledge about contraceptives, insight into the sexual potential of the human body, and respect for other people's sexuality and ways of life. Experiencing sexual freedom also involves enjoyment and self-knowledge, as well as the ability to identify with other erotic experiences.

RFSU recognizes three different freedoms as fundamental preconditions for a person's ability to experience self-worth and self-esteem: Freedom to choose, Freedom to enjoy, Freedom to be oneself.

Sexual life is full of situations that require choices. One of

these involves choice about the type of sexual activities in which a person wants to participate; another is choice of partner. Freedom to choose means that it is ultimately the individual who has control over acts related to sexuality and love. It also means that nobody should be compelled, or compel somebody else, to perform sexual acts against their will. All people must be offered the preconditions for making their choices with the greatest possible degree of freedom. The aim of information about sexuality and personal relationships is to provide the knowledge that makes such choices possible.

From first breath as a baby to time of death, a person has the capacity to experience enjoyment. Discovering, with the greatest possible individual freedom, the wealth of opportunities offered by the body and the world of sexuality results in self-esteem and trust in other people. Freedom to enjoy entails that a person is able to make such discoveries in the realms of sexuality and love on his or her own terms. Knowledge of and insight into interplay with other people are conditions for discovering sexual enjoyment.

As a result of interaction with other people, we get to know ourselves. Attraction, excitement, love, being randy – call it what you will – are sensations we experience in relation to others, and also in relation to ourselves. Conceptions about the male and female genders are created in society, and, for example, form the basis for regarding heterosexuality as the norm. This is something that permeates all aspects of society and can limit an individual's emotional life, relationships and sexuality. Eventually, individuals start to understand their own character, their personality – their identity. Freedom to be oneself means that people can be themselves, be open and honest in relation to others. Freedom to be oneself involves a lifelong process of gaining insights. RFSU wants to safeguard the individual's right and ability to choose his or her way of life.

Respect is important if the sexual freedom of men and women is to be upheld. The ability to identify with the experiences and feelings of “the other” forms the basis for

sexual freedom.

A prerequisite for freedom to choose is mutuality. One person's freedom to choose must not infringe upon the freedom of others.

Everyone has the potential for sexual enjoyment. One person's enjoyment must not be gained at another person's expense. One person's enjoyment must not result in another person's powerlessness.

Freedom to be oneself is something that everyone strives for. Being forced to deny your identity, not being permitted to live the life you want to live, is a violation of our most central values. However, the way one person lives must not result in somebody else being subjected to force.

Sexual compulsion, in the form of abuse, harassment or persecution, for example, is a violation of the sexual freedoms.

In practice, withholding knowledge about how to realize sexual possibilities and ways of being also involves a form of force and a violation of the sexual freedoms.

Sexuality has been described in many ways: as energy, being randy, sensuality, love, pleasure. The descriptions are largely positive. Affirming one's sexuality is regarded as a significant goal in human life.

Today, the threat of sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV/AIDS, is the main reason why many people view sexuality problematically.

In recent years, we have slowly acquired insights into the positive power and importance of sexuality. During recent decades, women in particular have started to give words to their sexuality and experiences. Homosexual and bisexual women and men have also started to assert their interests and their right to live their own lives on the same terms as others, including in sexual respects. People have increasingly realized that the way we live out our sexuality is something highly individual, which is affected by many factors in our lives.

Sexuality during childhood

CHILDREN ARE SEXUAL BEINGS capable of both sensuality and love. Human beings are born to a sexual life, and sexual interest can manifest itself in different ways during childhood, such as “playing doctor”, masturbation and expressing curiosity about what adults do. Children eventually learn what their immediate environment accepts, and what is regarded as shameful. Although childhood sexuality differs in many respects from adult sexuality, there is no reason to believe that children’s emotions are less strong in terms of either sexuality or love. A positive attitude to children as sexual beings requires that we do not make them feel ashamed of their feelings and do not belittle them.

For children to be able to develop in a state of relative sexual freedom, it is essential that adults do not encroach upon children’s sexual boundaries. No adult has the right to harass, exploit or in any way use children sexually. Even though a child may behave in a manner that could be interpreted as sexual, it is always the responsibility of adults to set limits.

RFSU is working for a society in which children are given as much freedom as possible to discover for themselves their relational skills and sexuality, their identity, and their own will.

Child-care services, schools and youth-recreation centres play an important role in creating self-knowledge and awareness in sexual matters. Throughout a child’s years in school, sexuality and personal relationships should be included, either as a scheduled subject in its own right or as subareas within various other subjects.

There is still a large grey area with respect to sexual abuse of children and adolescents. RFSU believes that society should highlight the situation of sexually exploited children in various ways, and provide support and treatment for all

the parties concerned.

RFSU wants:

- Children and adolescents to have the opportunity to receive factual answers to their questions about sexuality from, for example, parents, child day-care staff, schools and youth-recreation centres, and through the helplines and newspapers that focus on this age group. The press, weekly magazines and other types of media should be supported in providing age-relevant answers to questions from children and adolescents.
- The staff of child day-care services, schools and youth-recreation centres to receive education/training in matters involving the sexuality of children and the sexual exploitation of children and youth. In order to counteract sexual harassment, it is important that boys and girls learn at an early stage to respect their own boundaries and those of others.
- Society to develop strategies for protecting children and young people from sexual abuse and destructive sexual transgression. Society should establish both national and local action plans that facilitate swift intervention when sexual abuse of children is discovered, which should also include treatment for both the victim and the perpetrator. The action plans should be based on collaboration between social-welfare, public-prosecutor and police authorities, and also treatment/psychotherapeutic staff.

Sexual ways of being

IN A WORLD ASSUMING that heterosexuality is the standard for how people should think and live, a person’s realization that he or she is not heterosexual can give rise to anxiety and ambivalence. The freedom to be oneself incorporates a capacity to understand oneself and to live in accordance with

one's own personality. Accordingly, in school education, the military service, or in other contexts where individuals come into contact with community institutions, heterosexuality should not be taken for granted as "the right way to live".

Swedish society is to blame for the way that homosexual and bisexual people have been forced to live a concealed and undignified life. As recently as 1979, homosexuality was classified as an illness. A finger has also been pointed at homosexuals through discriminatory legislation and insulting psychologising. The community has far too rarely spoken out on behalf of homosexual people.

Persecution and harassment of homosexual and bisexual people also place in question the rights of all people to choose their own pattern of life, forms of enjoyment, and ways of experimenting with personal identity and nature of life. Sexual freedom means specifically that each and every person must be allowed to find his or her own individual path.

Homosexual and bisexual people must not be subject to special treatment, or excluded from a certain social setting for religious, political or social reasons.

Freedom to be oneself also includes alternative ways of being, such as that of a transvestite or transsexual.

Transvestism means that a person wants to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex (on occasions or permanently). This form of behaviour has been the subject of ridicule and even discrimination in various respects, which reflects society's inability to be flexible.

To be transsexual means that a person wants to change gender. Transsexuals feel that they are "born in the wrong body". Since the 1950s, methods have been developed that, to the extent possible, satisfy a transsexual person's desire to change sex. The long-term consequences of treatment have now been found to be generally positive.

RFSU wants:

- Society to take forceful action against the systematic persecution and discrimination to which homosexual, bisexual and transgender people are currently subjected.
- A ban on discrimination against homosexual, bisexual and transgender people to be constitutionally included in relevant legislation.
- All forms of partnerships to be equated with marriage, and homosexuals to have the same right as heterosexuals to marry, including the possibility of a church wedding ceremony, and to be in association of all associated rights.
- Homosexuals and bisexuals to have the same practical possibilities as heterosexuals to exercise their legal right to adopt children.
- Homosexuality, bisexuality or being transgender to be accepted for the granting of asylum in Sweden, in the same way as being subject to political or racial persecution.
- Society to contribute to the dissemination of increased understanding of transvestism/being transgender.
- The "conversion" of people to the opposite sex to be facilitated, socially, legally and physically, in all respects.

Sexual fantasies and acts

SEXUAL FANTASIES BELONG to the field of sexual freedom. Being excited by the ideas of certain situations, events and images can enrich people's sexual lives, regardless of whether there is any intention to apply any such fantasy in practice. Some sexual fantasies can be exciting, while still being things that the individual would absolutely not want to experience in reality. In other cases, they may be dreams that the individual has not yet had an opportunity to experience. The vast majority of people are capable of distinguishing between fantasies that will or will not ever become reality.

Sexual acts can be incomprehensible and even repulsive to certain people, while being extremely arousing to others. This is exemplified by various kinds of acts of sexual compulsion that may be arranged by mutual agreement; the people concerned describe such acts as constituting the utmost freedom in terms of avoiding responsibility. Others may regard them as representing an extreme form of repression.

As long as sexual arrangements of this kind are the result of mutuality and respect, they remain an expression of sexual freedom. However, there are always risks and boundaries that must be respected. People are vulnerable, and an act of sexual compulsion that a person says he or she wants to experience may have a destructive effect in the long term.

RFSU wants

- Continuous discussions about the troublesome issues in which sexuality is associated with special interests that could, for example, involve compulsion or violence.
- People who seek help for problems involving sexual addiction to receive counselling and assistance in a more easily available and extensive manner than is available today.
- Society to invest in the education/training of caring and counselling personnel on sexual issues and special sexual problems.

Teenage sexuality

ADOLESCENTS ARE BECOMING increasingly sexually active. Most boys and girls start to masturbate during their teens. By the age of 17, approximately half of all boys and girls have had sexual intercourse. Teenagers receive information about sexuality from friends, parents, teachers and youth-counselling centres. Voluntary organisations, including RFSU, are another source. Insight is gained when an individual's knowledge is tested in reality. In many cases, it is also during

this period that people start to think about whether they are heterosexual or homosexual.

Nowadays, many young women and men regard a youth clinic as the obvious place to contact if they have personal questions to consider.

The provision of sexuality education in school has always been one of RFSU's main demands. The role of the school is to provide knowledge and to process values, e.g. through open discussion in the classroom. Equality between girls and boys, or men and women, is another important factor in sexuality and personal relationships. According to the current national curriculum in Sweden, headteachers and their teaching staff are responsible for ensuring that schools provide education of this kind.

In many places, however, sexuality education in schools is still excessively summary and subjective; no holistic approach is adopted, since the education provided often focuses solely on reproduction and sexually transmitted infections. What pupils need is a broad form of sexuality education that includes discussions about bodies, relationships, values and society's views on sex. Swedish surveys show that the quality of sexuality education is uneven. School children frequently say that they would like more knowledge about relationships, including consideration of questions about "how to live", and also greater discussion.

Moreover, sexuality and personal relationships still do not form a compulsory subject at teacher training colleges in Sweden. This is something that must change, since teachers are actually required to provide education in this area.

Freedom to choose requires being clear about whether to say "yes" or "no" to sex, about how to define sexuality and its expressions, and about wanting to have sex or not. Schools do not have the right to condemn their pupils' ways of expressing their sexuality, so long as this does not violate anybody else.

Freedom to enjoy means that schools must communicate a positive image of the opportunities of sexuality.

Freedom to be oneself requires that schools adopt a positive basic approach to their pupils' needs to search for a sexual identity as a way of finding individual answers to questions involving their personality.

Accordingly, schools must cooperate with pupils and parents in order to take a stand against anything that limits these freedoms. Sexual abuse and harassment restricts people's will independently to decide over their own sexual lives. Providing knowledge about how to handle conflicts and to cope with destructive aggression, particularly in circumstances surrounding separations, is an important aspect of knowledge about personal relationships.

Knowledge of contraceptives, in order to provide protection against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, and also insight into the opportunities for desire represented by our bodies, is a prerequisite for freedom to enjoy. Sexuality education also entails creating the ability to assess and avoid the risks associated with sexuality, and to provide teenagers with training in making their own decisions. A judgmental attitude to sexual differences and ways of being limits people's potential to explore their sexuality and to understand themselves.

One important role that education in sexuality and personal relationships can play is to address questions concerning sexuality from the viewpoint of both equality and equity. Such education can help to confirm young people's right to their own sexuality and sexual freedom, and provide them with the strength to set their own boundaries. This assumes an ability to dare to choose, to enjoy, and to be oneself.

RFSU wants

- Sexuality and personal relationships to be a compulsory part of the curriculum of teacher training colleges, and teachers to receive continuous education in this arena. The curriculum must encompass knowledge of our gender system and heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality. The education provided must be value-free.

- That education in sexuality and personal relationships is a guaranteed feature of education in lower and upper secondary schools – as a separate subject, as an area of knowledge within several subjects, or as a theme in the form of, say, “life skills”.
- A reinforcement of the ideas inherent in education about sexuality and personal relationships that aim at gender equality, the ability to relate to others, and a positive sexual outlook. Teaching in gender-related issues must be included. Respect for differences in ways of sexual being must be a cornerstone of efforts made by schools in the field of sexuality and personal relationships.
- Society to allocate funds to enable all young men and women to receive access to a youth-counselling centre close to their homes, and to secure the provision of appropriate activities.
- All adults in schools to receive the training that enables them to support school education in sexuality and personal relationships.

Choosing how to live

IT IS AROUND SEXUALITY, fellowship and love that we create relationships which, to a greater or lesser extent, are stable. Even a quick encounter between people demands mutual respect and consideration. And this also clearly applies to lasting relationships.

Freedom to choose entails that sexual choices are the result of mutual respect, and that the sexual choices of women and men have the same value. This is also a prerequisite for freedom to enjoy.

Freedom to choose requires that people have the knowledge and practical ability to protect themselves – from an unwanted pregnancy or from a sexually transmitted infection. For decades, RFSU has worked to build a safety net in Swedish society. This net comprises education, informa-

tion and counselling, and also access to safe contraception, including emergency contraceptive pills. It also includes abortion if the woman so requests.

Despite this, not all groups are reached. For example, information about sexuality and personal relationship fails to reach many groups of immigrants. Swedish society has grossly neglected to provide immigrants with information about its sexuality-related norms and values, and also facts about sexually transmitted infections, protection against infections and related legal duties, and contraceptives.

Sexuality and personal relationships do not solely involve knowledge about the practical aspects of sex. They also entail an understanding of oneself and one's relationships with others, and the ability to choose the life one wants to live. The welfare society in Sweden has provided increased opportunities for people to choose the way they want to live. Various forms of living have emerged. As well as the conventional nuclear family, we now have registered partnerships and extended families, and couples can be married, live together or live apart. Many people strive to create a lasting, possibly life-long, relationship. Others may prefer being single, brief encounters, a life with many partners, or a life of celibacy. All forms of relationships can be discussed from the viewpoints of choice and opportunity.

Changed male and female roles, difficulties in finding a balance between working life and private life, between parenthood and a two-person relationship, have significantly increased the frequency of conflicts in relationships. Divorce can mean freedom and increased quality of life, but it can also result in painful experiences for both adults and children. Accordingly, there are greater needs than ever before for counselling and support, knowledge of relationships, and self-awareness.

Freedom and caring about others mean that we are continuously confronted by choice. Today, partners can choose each other for emotional reasons – and separate from each other for the same reasons. The importance of

sexuality is greater now than ever before. It is a well-known fact that, in many cases, a couple's sexual life changes when they have children. The sexual problems and opportunities that arise at times of change in life should be highlighted and taken seriously.

We also need a safety net for adults: counselling in sexual matters and treatment for sexual problems, advice about contraceptives, and safe and easily available contraceptives.

The contraceptive used by men, the condom, provides protection from unwanted pregnancies and from sexually transmitted infections. Although there are currently no male hormonal contraceptives that give men the same opportunities as women to control their fertility, research in this field is under way and requires increased support. The need for hormonal contraception for men is a matter of equality.

Although there are contraceptives for women that protect against pregnancy, only Femidom protects against sexually transmitted infections. Knowledge about this form of contraception should be disseminated, and product development encouraged.

RFSU's view has always been that safe contraceptives are a prerequisite for a positive sexual life.

The ideal of the nuclear family often makes it difficult for people who for various reasons live without children. Childlessness may be a conscious choice or due to infertility. RFSU believes that the possibility of insemination and egg donation should be available to anybody who wants it.

RFSU wants

- A society that does not assign any form of personal relationship precedence over another.
- Fathers-to-be to receive support and information that enables them to utilise their right to paternal leave of absence to an increased degree and to become more active in fatherhood.
- Sexual matters to be included in educational programs for parents.

- Sexual counselling and treatment to be extended and included in social insurance.
- Family counselling to be extended in order to shorten the waiting period for any such services needed.
- The creation of educational programs giving competencies for people working as sexuality educators.
- A sexology qualification to become a required competency for people working as sex counsellors or sexologically oriented psychotherapists.
- An increase in the resources available for providing information about sexuality and personal relationships to various groups of immigrants.
- Increased support to be given for the development of new effective contraceptives for men and women and for these to be made available on the Swedish market.
- An increase in resources available for providing information about sexuality and personal relationships to people with functional impairments.
- Egg donation and insemination to be permitted for both lesbian couples and single women.

Pornography

HUMAN BEINGS HAVE ALWAYS described sexual acts in both words and images. Experiencing sexual descriptions in these ways is a feature of our sexual freedom. The purpose of pornography is to depict sexuality in a way that excites the people who are exposed to it.

But within pornography there are many examples of how sexual freedom for one person can entail a violation of sexual freedom for another. For this reason, people should not have to be exposed to pornography that they do not want to see. That is why pornographic public displays are prohibited, and why there are laws against child and violent pornography.

Within society as a whole and also within RFSU, discus-

sions are constantly under way concerning the boundaries for pornography. It is obvious that people, and children in particular, currently risk experiencing pornography in a manner that can be likened to sexual abuse. Some pornography focuses solely on scenes where women are violated. In addition, the production of certain types of pornography is also associated with sexual compulsion, abuse, prostitution and financial crime.

For these reasons, it is important that clear-cut limits are imposed on pornography, particularly that which involves photographs of and films with real actors. RFSU wants to protect people's sexual freedom to experience erotic and pornographic depictions, at the same time as it wishes limits to be imposed on any type of pornography that is degrading, and in which actors/actresses are clearly made to suffer.

RFSU wants

- Society actively to question public displays and one-sided descriptions of women's and men's sexuality as they appear in pornography.
- Schools actively to make efforts to address and discuss pornography and the simplified and degrading impression of male and female sexuality that it frequently depicts.
- Society to sharpen measures so as to enforce current laws prohibiting pornography involving violence or children.
- Society to review current legislation covering pornography that is degrading, concerns compulsion, or involves people being placed in a position of powerlessness.
- Sweden to work for inspections and controls of production in the pornography industry.
- Viewing or reading pornography to be an active choice. This entails, for example, that pay-TV channels only be permitted to transmit pornography as part of a program range that is purchased separately, not part of a package.

- Society to investigate how Swedish restrictions on freedom of expression can also be applied to photographs and films transmitted via satellite and the Internet.
- To address the issue of how violent pornography can affect young people's sexuality and attitudes towards it, and support to be given to research in this area.

Powerlessness, violence and sexuality

VIOLATION OF A PERSON'S RIGHT to self-determination and sexual freedom means that one person gains power over another. This can take the form of sexual harassment in the workplace, violence in a relationship, or rape. The vast majority of acts of sexual harassment and violence are committed by men against women. There can be many reasons why men sexually persecute or abuse women. This has also been described in research, not least through the work conducted at the RFSU Clinic. It is always the perpetrator who bears the responsibility for any physical act of violence.

Sexual violence can have many objectives – from satisfying sexual needs, a need to control others, acting out hate and confirming affinity to a gang, to keeping women in check in both the family and in society. Sexualised violence in the form of sexual harassment, rape and assault of women is unacceptable. These are all expressions of an unequal balance of power between women and men. Sexualised violence almost always involves the exercise of power. Rape as an act of war is the ultimate form of repression, and is also a tool used in ethnic cleansing.

RFSU wants:

- Society further to develop methods for preventing, uncovering and taking legal measures against sexual violence and sexual abuse.

- Improved support and treatment to be provided to people exposed to sexual violence, through, for example, training for the staff of legal, care, social and police services. The purposes are to discover abuse, take relevant legal measures, and provide support and treatment to all involved.
- Perpetrators of violence to undergo compulsory treatment, in order to prevent future abuse.
- Society to allocate funds to ensure that abused women receive guaranteed access to a local emergency shelter.
- Schools to be allocated resources so that they can address and analyse sexualised violence that may find expression in pornography, prostitution and sexual abuse, and also how sexualised violence can be counteracted.

Selling sexuality

RFSU HAS ALWAYS ADOPTED a stance against the risks and negative social and individual consequences of prostitution. RFSU has never believed that legislation against prostitutes or their customers is the right method for solving the problem. In RFSU's view legislation often results in the commercial-sex industry moving underground. In addition, such legislation is also often used as a substitute for social support for the people who are most exposed.

Superficially, trading in sex can be viewed as an agreement, like any other kind of commercial transaction. But it is not as simple as that. The mental and social consequences are well documented. In many cases, female prostitutes have been the victims of sexual abuse as children. Often, they are users of drugs and alcohol. Many female prostitutes are exploited by pimps and landlords. The life of a prostitute may start as a job or a posing assignment in a strip club or in the porn industry.

Trafficking in people, which involves the sale of women and children across national borders, is the most extreme expression of women's inferior status and economic unequal-

ity between men and women. Trafficking in people is well organised and conducted all over the world, and has strong links with financial crime and the drugs trade. It has now reached Sweden.

No prostitution is possible without demand. It is therefore important, in all efforts made to minimise or eliminate prostitution, to focus on the people who buy sex. This is a matter, among other things, of changing the attitudes and conditions that apply between men and women. For example, issues of sexuality and equality must be an important part of education in sexuality and personal relationships.

In recent years, an RFSU project has been under way with the aim of providing treatment for men who are addicted to sex. The experiences gained from this project and similar activities are being used as a key starting point for providing help to male sex addicts who want to stop buying sexual services.

RFSU wants:

- The commercial-sex trade, its views on sex and people, and its consequences to be discussed in schools as part of education in sexuality and personal relationships.
- The impacts of the Swedish law banning the buying of sex to be studied and evaluated.
- Local government to assume social responsibility for counteracting prostitution. It is important that funds be specially earmarked for local authorities' work involving female and male prostitutes.
- An intensification of outreach activities and research aimed at men who are addicted to sex and men who purchase sex.
- Investigations into the possibility of enacting new legislation to counter trafficking in people and commercial trading in sex in clubs and via the Internet.

Self-determination with respect to one's own body

EVER SINCE THE ORGANISATION'S inception in 1933, RFSU has regarded abortion as a central issue. The woman's right to make her own decision about whether or not to have children is of fundamental importance to her self-esteem and freedom independently to choose how to live. Sweden's Abortion Act, which was passed in 1975, gives women the right to have an abortion without stating any reasons up to the end of the 18th week of pregnancy. Thereafter, the National Board of Health and Welfare must provide its consent. An abortion is not permitted if the foetus can live outside the uterus. In practice, the current limit for this is 22 weeks. Virtually all abortions are carried out before the twelfth week. With respect to abortions carried out after the 18th week, it is the task of the National Board of Health and Welfare's Legal Council to assess the matter, and come to a decision. Such abortions are mainly conducted for medical reasons.

RFSU is opposed to the introduction of a conscience clause for nurses and doctors during their education or in the course of their professional practice. RFSU is also opposed to any routine practice of performing burial services for aborted foetuses.

When the current Swedish Abortion Act was introduced, resources were also invested in measures aimed at preventing abortions. This has provided indisputable evidence that the number of abortions declines if a society invests funds in information and education.

RFSU wants:

- The current Swedish Abortion Act to be retained.
- Society to increase investments in preventive information/educational measures.
- A guarantee that information about the Abortion Act is included in sexuality education in schools.

- An intensification of efforts to develop alternative abortion methods.
- Women to have the right to choose between medical and surgical abortion.
- Foreign women to have the right to abortion in Sweden.

The right to a sexual life

SEXUALITY HAS A CONSIDERABLE VALUE in many people's lives. At the same time, it is evident in many ways, such as in the provision of inadequate information, that society is failing to provide people with the opportunity to pursue a sexual life.

Many people with functional impairments are denied the opportunity to understand their own sexuality and how this can be expressed.

People with impaired sight have received little if any knowledge about, for example, the physiology of the body, intercourse, sexually transmitted infections, body language and the various signals that are a part of sex play.

People with spinal injuries, or who suffer from cerebral palsy or some other neurological functional impairment, need special support and knowledge to enable them to realise their sexual potential, and they often require sexual devices to compensate for impaired mobility.

People with mental impairments need specially adapted knowledge, individual counselling and continuous personal support to enable them to understand and express their sexuality. People born with, or who suffer a functional impairment at an early age, can find it more difficult to develop a sexual life of their own. Accordingly, the parents and relatives of such children and young people require more support and education.

The sexual desire of functionally impaired people is still subject to taboo and ignorance. Health-service staff may find it difficult to discuss and cope with the sexuality

of functionally impaired people if they lack adequate education. Functionally impaired people may also find it difficult to talk about their sexual situation.

As a result of new medical treatments for HIV-positive people, their appetite for life and sexual desire have now largely returned. As a result, many of the HIV-positive now regard having sex as a self-evident practice. The three freedoms also give them the self-esteem and perception of self-worth that is so important for a person who wants a full and varied life. Everyone must be granted the freedom to enjoy, but this freedom must not be achieved at the expense of any other. Nobody must unknowingly be exposed to the risk of being infected by HIV. At the same time, all people have a responsibility to ensure that they do not expose themselves to such a risk.

RFSU wants:

- A guarantee that information and study material will be provided to functionally impaired people and adapted to their needs.
- Personal assistants and healthcare and school staff to receive adequate education in matters involving HIV, sexuality, personal relationships and functional impairments.
- Sexual devices to be made available to people who need them, and new devices to be developed.
- Service staff employed in communal residences to receive education in sexuality and personal relationships.
- Special sex counsellors to be educated/trained in providing practical help to functionally impaired people who need and want help in order to perform sexual acts.
- The duty of information and other compulsory measures in Sweden's current Communicable Diseases Act to be abolished.

Sexuality of elderly people

IN RECENT YEARS, several surveys have demonstrated the importance of sexuality for the well-being of people during the later years of their lives. Statistics show that many people have sexually satisfying lives at high ages, while others give up their sexual life for a variety of reasons. Although some of these reasons may be medical, a major role is also played by the prejudices of the people concerned or of others with respect to how people should look and behave. General ideals regarding beauty, stereotyped attitudes about gender roles and inadequate self-esteem are examples of factors that can function as impediments to sexual experience.

The older generation grew up in a community more characterised than now by sexual denial and non-acceptance of experimental sexuality. It might be said that the older generation has had fewer opportunities to find their own sexuality, their own sexual expressions.

The fact that so little has been invested in the sexual well-being of the elderly is connected to society's problematising approach to sexuality-related matters. Society focuses on sexual information/education aimed at avoiding the adverse effects of sexuality. Only in recent years has sexuality in the form of emotion and experience been attributed intrinsic value in information and education aimed at the young.

It is essential that all generations be allowed to benefit from non-problematising information/education efforts. The elderly must also be able to enjoy the sexual freedoms, including the ability to individualise their sexuality. Freedom to enjoy entails giving elderly people support in rediscovering their bodies. Freedom to choose might entail breaking out of rigid sexual patterns in favour of a more suitable sexual approach. Freedom to be oneself might also require abstaining from an active sexual life.

RFSU wants

- Society to invest resources in research aimed at highlighting the importance of sexuality to elderly people.
- Special measures to be implemented to inform and support men and women who are to undergo medical treatment that might affect their sexuality.
- Special measures to be implemented to rehabilitate and support women and men with sex-related illnesses or dysfunctions.
- Information programs to be implemented in order to highlight opportunities for sexuality during old age.

Sexual freedoms must apply world-wide

THE SEXUAL FREEDOMS APPLY TO EVERYONE. The freedoms to be oneself, to choose, and to enjoy are equally important throughout the world, regardless of whether a person is poor or rich. These freedoms must be safeguarded by rights to health and knowledge, and the right freely to make a choice of one's own. Impediments to freedom are greater in countries that are less open and have more taboos concerning sexuality, although this does not mean that people in these countries are in any lesser need of them. In matters regarding sexuality, love and desire, and also with respect to abortion, and violence and fear connected with sexuality, people in different parts of the world are more similar than they are different.

In many countries, young women and also young men and children are forced to have sexual contacts with adults, mainly men. This may occur in the form of prostitution and trafficking in people (international trading in women for the purpose of prostitution), as well as within the family. The reasons may pertain to power and control, or may derive from inadequate knowledge and misconceptions held by both men and women.

Young people all over the world ask the same questions, and they have the right to expect answers that are of use to them when they discover their sexuality and seek ways of approaching it. Due to the similarities between people, an exchange of experiences regarding information/education, prevention and care methods between societies and countries that are very different in other ways, such as in terms of religion, economic conditions and culture, is also meaningful.

Freedom to be oneself

This requires young women and men to be allowed to shape their lives and values in “the new age”. As a result of new types of mass media, the world has shrunk; young people, particularly in cities, listen to the same music, watch the same video films, and know – via the Internet – more about each other than ever before. This means that many young people of today lack adult role models, since the adult generation grew up in “another world”.

Freedom to be oneself entails having influence over one’s own life, e.g. not being forced into a very early marriage arranged by parents.

It means that people who are HIV positive must receive healthcare and love. This entails that stigmatisation must be combated, and methods for openness regarding HIV reinforced. Breaking silence strengthens capacity for establishing solidarity with carriers of the HIV virus, and also with their partners, children and relatives.

Freedom to be oneself means that a woman must be able to be a single mother, without being condemned or cast out from community or family. Both men and women have the right to decide about their fertility and sexuality regardless of age. It is a matter of women and men being attributed the same value, and having equal power. Gender equality is a prerequisite for shared responsibility and shared desire, and is a foundation for counteracting violence and abuse. Equal value must apply to people in all age groups.

Freedom to be oneself also entails that all people are

able to express their sexual identity. Homosexuality is denied in many cultures via legislation, and through the values by which it is condemned, violated or punished. This is a threat to the freedom to be oneself.

Freedom to choose

Freedom to choose means that every person has the right to choose if, when, how and with whom to have sexual relations, marry or have children. This freedom encompasses the right to information and access to protection against the adverse consequences of sexuality. It is essential that access to contraceptives, safe and legal abortion, and infertility treatment be provided to everybody, regardless of where they live. This gives young people and adults, single people and couples freedom of choice through good clinics, openness and supportive legislation.

Forcing other people to sell their sexuality for the personal gain of anyone else is a severe violation of an individual’s right to choose. From this perspective, trafficking in people is totally unacceptable and must be combated.

Many women in the world are threatened on a daily basis by violence connected with sexuality. Many women cannot, or somehow do not manage to, demand safe sex – for example, to insist that the man uses a condom – because they know that they will be subjected to violence from the man who wants to have sex with them. The primary targets of sexualised violence are male and female children, teenagers and adult women. Such violence is manifested in rape and sexual abuse, and in beating or assault.

Freedom to choose means that everyone has the right to say either yes or no to sexual relations or acts. It means that abuse and threats are unacceptable, and must be counteracted in every possible way. To achieve this goal, it is essential that systematic and organised efforts be targeted at both the people who are, or risk being, exposed to violence and at the people who use violence and threats. Supporting only women and youths is not enough. It is also essential

to reach men, and understand the mechanisms underlying violence, to be able to prevent it.

In a world now plagued by HIV/AIDS, a high rate of maternal mortality and many unsafe and dangerous abortions, access to contraceptives, combined with the knowledge and self-confidence necessary to demand that they are used, is a prerequisite for the freedom to choose, and is also a form of life insurance.

Political, religious and other types of leaders must work to support and defend everyone working for good sexuality education, for youth clinics pledged to secrecy, for openness regarding the sexual relations of young people, and for their right to support – rather than condemnation, guilt and shame. It happens far too often that leaders fail to provide such support, referring instead to sexuality as a sensitive and difficult issue that only parents can discuss with their children. Community leaders frequently choose the easy way out, and the message they give to young people is that they should completely refrain from sexual contact.

Freedom to enjoy

Freedom to enjoy means freedom from violence and compulsion, freedom to choose a partner, and freedom from fear of serious illnesses or dangerous pregnancies. Freedom to enjoy also means freedom from guilt and shame. Freedom to enjoy is not just of second-hand value, reserved for the few people who can afford it and who have access to knowledge. It is something we must work with in parallel with preventive measures and sexuality education/information. We all search for sexuality and closeness in various situations in life – in war and peace, in refugee camps and in luxury homes. Nobody has a greater right to this than anyone else. But we have different needs that have to be satisfied if freedom to enjoy is to become available to everyone. Not being afraid is a prerequisite for capacity to enjoy. Knowledge is a path to self-esteem and the ability to strive for personal enjoyment in words or actions.

Persons searching for the freedom to enjoy require knowledge about their own body, about what is needed in order to gain protection from things they fear, and knowledge about prejudices and misconceptions. For example, those who believe masturbation is harmful find it difficult to take pleasure in their own body.

Freedom to be oneself, to choose and to enjoy must not result in another person's lack of freedom. One experience that many people can endorse is that shared enjoyment results in the doubling of pleasure. One person's freedom is enriched by that of another.

RFSU is making international efforts with regard to sexual and reproductive health and rights – mainly focused on young people, both male and female. Projects run in collaboration with voluntary organisations, largely in Africa and Asia, are generating knowledge and forming a foundation for joint advocacy on both a national basis, in relation to Swedish politicians and the Swedish public, and internationally, in the UN and other international forums. RFSU participates in international conferences and networks in order to address issues involving the sexual freedoms. Projects provide an opportunity to exchange experiences, develop working methods, and intensify knowledge.

RFSU wants

- At least ten percent of the Swedish development-aid budget to be allocated to the arena of sexual and reproductive health.
- Public debate to devote greater attention to development-aid work aimed at young people and sexuality, for politicians to pursue these matters and include them on the political agenda, and for them to be given increased prominence in Sweden's and the EU's foreign-aid budget.
- Sweden to work consistently to make abortions safe, and matters involving reproduction to be linked to active sexuality education and contraceptive counselling.

- The high rate of maternal mortality connected with child-birth and unsafe abortion to be combated by means of specific measures to enable the fulfilment of international agreements aimed at reduction in maternal mortality.
- Violence and abuse against women and children to be highlighted and struggled against internationally, and Swedish foreign aid to be targeted at measures that strengthen the forces combating violence against and sexual abuse of women and children.
- Sweden to support initiatives aimed at ensuring that boys and young men receive information about sexuality and personal relationships, to support activities targeted at strengthening the position of girls and young women, and to ensure that all boys and girls receive access to sexuality education, counselling and contraception.
- The Swedish government to conduct the measures necessary in Sweden, and to take initiatives in the EU and UN, so as to put into effect the decisions taken at the 1994 Population Conference in Cairo and the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing. All this also applies to other relevant international declarations and conventions agreed by the international community.
- The Swedish government to combat trafficking in all possible ways, and to work to ensure that the decisions taken at the Follow-up Conference five years after Beijing are put into effect.

What we might become

OVER THE PAST FIFTY YEARS, there has been a radical change in views over what is masculine and feminine, over what is motherly and fatherly, and over women's and men's ways of being and their capabilities. Also, within RFSU, as in society as a whole, perspectives on the sexuality of both men and women have obtained new dimensions.

In recent decades, researchers have shown how children

learn their human roles and ways of being at a very early age. During upbringing, children receive both conscious and subconscious schooling in behaviour that creates social differences between boys and girls. Such schooling functions as a filter to reality – people see what they want to see.

The sexuality reflected in human relations and in various other human arenas is undergoing a process of transformation. The individual can avoid pre-prescribed sexual roles and patterns. In various groups, people find alternative ways of showing their love and sexuality. Sexual roles and pre-set models of what love is will change in the future, not just in Sweden but also in other parts of the world.

Key concepts in the development of human relations are freedom, equality and mutuality. These are also prerequisites for a person's freedom individually to shape his or her life and sexuality.

Today, infatuation, love and parenthood are possibly the strongest driving forces underlying the will to create a lasting relationship. Individual freedom is both a prerequisite for lasting love and a threat to it. We can more freely choose to be together with someone else, but we also have greater social freedom to separate.

For many years, RFSU has participated in discussions and debates concerning the various forms that personal relationships take on. We have asked questions like: "Why is it so difficult for a couple to stay together?", "How do we find someone to love?", and "How can we live together?". RFSU has also questioned pre-prescribed sexual roles. Acknowledging women's sexual pleasure, revealing men as sexually receiving beings and changing gender roles have consistently been at the centre of RFSU discussions in recent decades.

RFSU wants

- Society actively to break stereotypes and prejudices concerning pre-set roles and structures about what is considered to be manly and womanly.

***Principles and Policies adopted at
RFSU's general meeting in May, 2003.***

RFSU
The Association for Sexuality Education
P O Box 12128, 102 24 Stockholm
+46-8-692 07 00
www.rfsu.se

