

**Statement to the OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism,
Xenophobia and Discrimination
in Brussels 13-14 September 2004
by Norway's Ambassador to the OSCE, H.E. Ms. Mette Kongsheim**

Mr. Chairman,

We, the OSCE participating States, have agreed on a number of important standards with a view to combating racism and ethnic discrimination. We have affirmed the importance of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and we have condemned all forms of discrimination and violence, including against any religious group or individual believer. The challenge we face, however, is how to implement these standards in practice. Norway therefore welcomes the action-oriented focus of this conference. We must set priorities for our future work, building on decisions already made. We also highly value the overarching concept of this conference, which is dialogue, and partnerships towards tolerance, respect and mutual understanding. The need for action and dialogue, Mr. Chairman, should be the clear message from this conference.

The starting point for governments when dealing with racism must be to put in place an adequate legal framework. Next come practical measures, which address all residents' rights to live in a society free of racism and discrimination.

In taking required measures and strengthening dialogue we all need to learn from each other, learn about experience gathered and possible best practices in fighting the wave of racism, xenophobia and discrimination. In my country's National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination the point of departure is that Norway is a multicultural society, and that cultural plurality enriches our lives and benefits the community.

Respect for human rights is enshrined in the Norwegian Constitution. Norway also has legal provisions that prohibit ethnic discrimination in several areas. But the legislation is

fragmented, so in order to get a more comprehensive approach in the legislative framework, a bill prohibiting ethnic, religious and other forms of discrimination will be submitted to the parliament in December of this year.

We also need effective implementing bodies. The Norwegian Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination provides legal assistance; it monitors and documents the various forms and extent of racial discrimination in Norway. As part of the government's efforts to combat discrimination, it has however been decided that gender and ethnic discrimination should be enforced by a single body: Such a new body, The Equality and Discrimination Ombud, will be established in January 2006. We believe that this consolidation will enhance our ability to monitor the situation, and increase our capacity to investigate and follow up individual cases. The Ombud will in addition play an important role in raising awareness and promoting equality. This reform sends the message that all forms of racism, discrimination and intolerance are equally abhorrent.

We will also have a special focus on the younger generation, in particular through the education system, as children brought up in a society based on respect and tolerance will hopefully build on awareness and understanding of values and respect for cultural diversities. We know only too well that violence that is rooted in racism and intolerance may have far-reaching implications ranging from the well-being of individuals to international peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,

- In concluding I would like to stress that an action oriented approach would be for OSCE participating States to make best efforts to put in place national legislation and enforcement mechanisms.
- Secondly, Participating states should report on measures taken to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination, as this would provide an opportunity to review progress and to ensure that commitments are translated into action. Such reporting mechanisms are now in place, and we commend in particular the ODIHR for its dedicated efforts in this respect..

- Thirdly, racism, xenophobia and discrimination must be addressed through a wide range of action, and by all relevant international actors. But co-ordination must be sought in order to strengthen the message, share best practices and prevent duplication of work. Norway, in our present capacity as chair of the Council of Europe, is working to establish closer co-operation between the OSCE and the Council, to better co-ordinate our efforts also in this area.
- Finally, Mr. Chairman, without dialogue little will be achieved in practice. It is through interfaith and intercultural dialogue that the OSCE Participating states and the rest of the international community can hope to get to grips with the problems we are faced with.

Thank you.