



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT BY NORWAY

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile to the 2013 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw 23 September, 2013. Working Session 1: Tolerance and non-discrimination (minorities)

Mr Moderator,

I would like to join other speakers in welcoming the new High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ms Astrid Thors. I thank her for her presentation and assure her of my delegation's continued support.

Mr Moderator,

In Norway five groups are considered as national minorities under the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. These are Jews, Roma, Romani/travellers, Norwegian Finns – also referred to as Kvens – and Forest Finns.

The main challenge to ensure the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in Norway has been to overcome the previous assimilation policy, to reconcile and to establish mutual trust and dialogue between the national minorities and the government.

Mr Moderator,

Let me share some of our experience with you. Norway's policies towards the Romani/travellers will serve to illustrate my point. The Romani/travellers have been victims of a harsh policy of assimilation. The aim was to eradicate their specific way of life. Some families even had their children taken away from them. This policy was in force up until 1980. In 1998 the government made a public apology for the treatment our Romani/travellers had suffered and they were granted the status of national minority.

Two years ago the government appointed a committee of independent experts. The purpose is to establish a shared understanding of past injustices and abuse, in order to facilitate the reconciliation process between the Romani/travellers and Norwegian authorities. The Romani/travellers' organizations have been strongly involved in drafting the terms of reference for the committee, and also attend the meetings as observers. This summer a new leader was appointed. I am pleased to inform you that this position is now held by Norway's former Foreign Minister, and previous High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr Knut Vollebæk.

Mr Moderator,

Close contact between the minority groups and the government is the key to better mutual understanding. We have therefore established a contact forum for minority and government representatives. To empower the national minorities as a dialogue partner, public grants are given to minority institutions and organizations. There is also financial support for minority language media.

Mr Moderator,

Information about the national minorities to the majority population is important to promote greater tolerance. Information material is developed for schools and public administration. In addition representatives from national minorities are invited to schools to talk to students and give personal testimonies.

Mr Moderator,

My country has had a history of intolerance towards national minorities. We believe that establishing historic facts and a shared understanding of past injustice will be the basis for reconciliation and respect for minority rights.

Thank you, Mr Moderator