



**NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

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**STATEMENT BY NORWAY ON THE FIRST SESSION
OF THE OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE
ON TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

As delivered by Ambassador Harald Neple, Tirana
21 May 2013

Session 1 - Combating intolerance and discrimination against any person, including racism, xenophobia and aggressive nationalism, in accordance with the existing OSCE commitments

- Aggressive nationalism, racism and xenophobia remain some of the most dangerous forms of discrimination in the OSCE area and will pose challenges to democracy and democratic institutions if not addressed. More than ever it is important to confront extremist ideologies, prejudices and stereotypes of cultural and religious intolerance in the public debate and to bring out the counter-arguments. Counter speech should be a major tool, not unduly limiting freedom of speech. A careful balance has to be struck here.
- The terrorist attacks in Norway in 2011, when 77 people were killed, were politically fuelled by hate towards a multicultural society, different religions, cultures and individual rights. They represented an attack on Norway both as a democratic society and on our values based on equality, non-discrimination and other fundamental human rights and freedoms.
- Our response to this was to intensify our resolve for more democracy, more openness and more inclusiveness.
- We must continue to strengthen our efforts to ensure that terms like cultural diversity

and multiculturalism are associated with mutual respect, tolerance and the freedom of the individual to make his or her own choices – independent of ethnicity, religion and cultural heritage.

- We must continuously fight misperceptions and stigmas attached to minorities of any kind, be it ethnic, religious or sexual minorities or people with disabilities, and spare no efforts in empowering each individual to make his or her own choices as to how to live their lives.
- The main battle against racism, racial discrimination and intolerance has to be fought at the national level. Norway's national action plan to promote equality and prevent ethnic discrimination (2009-2012) has 66 different measures with the involvement of eight government ministries. The action plan highlights the following three points:
 - o It is imperative to combat prejudices and racial discrimination through dialogue and open public debate.
 - o It is equally important to create an inclusive learning environment in kindergartens and schools that is free of racism, discrimination, bullying and violence, and an education system that reflects the diversity of the population.
 - o It is more important than ever to confront prejudice and stereotypes that foster cultural and religious intolerance in the public debate and to present sound counter-arguments.
- Intolerance and discrimination cannot be eliminated without focused long-term efforts by national authorities. Such efforts must include adoption - and implementation - of administrative and legislative measures, including the establishment of independent national institutions specialised in combating discrimination and promoting equality.
- Engaging civil society is also crucial if we are to succeed. Organisations and religious communities represent powerful voices in our work to combat intolerance and prejudice.
- At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that Norway is a small country. There are limits to what we can achieve on our own. We are searching for partners internationally, through the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and we are asking

whether there are gaps in the normative framework that should be filled or initiatives that should be taken.

- There is for example a clear need for systematic and recurrent collection of standardised and comparable data on the nature, extent and trends of different forms of intolerance, in order to ensure informed public debate as well as decision- and policy-making based on sufficient and reliable information.

Co-ordinated international efforts, including the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, in this area are vital if we are to overcome the challenges presented by intolerance and discriminatory attitudes against different groups within our multicultural societies.