



**NORWEGIAN MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

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

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile, Tirana  
21 May 2013

**Plenary Session 4: Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims**

Mr. Moderator,

During the last generation or so Norway has changed from a fairly homogenous country into a multicultural and multireligious one. Approximately 14 percent of Norway's population are now immigrants. In Oslo the figure is 30 percent.

Many of our immigrants have arrived from beyond Europe, bringing with them habits, culture and religion that distinguish them from the majority.

There are no accurate statistics on adherence to religion in Norway, but the number of members of Muslim congregations is now 112.000 – or 2.2 percent of the total population.

Mr. Moderator,

No multicultural or multireligious society is immune to intolerance and negative sentiments towards those who are different from the majority. Islamophobia is not unknown in my country.

Earlier today my delegation has spoken about the fundamental principles of tolerance and non-discrimination. We have elaborated on what Norwegian authorities do. We have mentioned the importance of education – an education that should foster a better understanding of the similarities between the three monotheistic religions rather than focusing on the differences.

Mr. Moderator,

I would like to underscore the role played by civil society.

In Norway we have seen that civil society and religious communities produce a powerful counter-narrative to intolerance and hate speech. They may often have the best response to right wing extremists, radicalized Muslim youth and narrow-minded members of mainstream society.

One example of such an organization is the Islamic Council of Norway. This organization has done a lot to help create a positive reputation of Islam in my country. This council has helped dispel the misconception that Islam is incompatible with a liberal democracy as Norway's.

Often the Islamic Council of Norway has entered into a powerful anti-racist and anti-intolerance alliance with the Church of Norway.

Therefore, Mr. Moderator, I may conclude with the following two points:

First, religious leaders play – and should play – an important role in our fight against intolerance.

Second, civil society should be empowered and supported so that they can play their role in this regard.

Thank you.