



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO REPORTS
OF THE THREE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE CHAIRPERSON- IN- OFFICE
ON TOLERANCE AND NON- DISCRIMINATION ISSUES

Delivered by Ambassador Anne- Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 9 December 2021

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you,

We thank the three Personal Representatives Rabbi Andrew Baker, Dr. Regina Polak, and Ambassador Mehmet Paçacı for their reports here today. What they have described, shows us that there is still work to be done. We encourage even more and substantial cooperation between the three representatives in the year to come.

As Chair of the Human Dimension Committee, I had the pleasure of inviting the three representatives to the committee in May, when the topic of our discussion was tolerance and non-discrimination. I thank them for participating in this informal Committee meeting, building up under our work on this topic.

Mdm Chair,

The freedom of religion, belief or non-belief is a human right of great importance both to the individual and to society. It ensures diverse societies. Tolerance in general allows for the benefits and opportunities that diversity can deliver. Tolerance gives space for persons to effectively exercise their human rights. It is a fundamental building-block for growth and prosperity in an increasingly globalized world.

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Intolerance and discrimination can perpetuate inequality. Hostile attitudes to minority groups represent a threat to society and democracy. Subjection to negative prejudices and discrimination leads to less participation in the public discourse. Consequently, society risks losing important voices and perspectives, and debate becomes less nuanced.

The freedom of religion or belief is an integrated part of my government's efforts to promote and protect human rights. It is closely linked to other universal rights, such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, and to gender equality. These are mutually dependent on each other. Individuals are often marginalized because of multiple forms of discrimination, based on for example their socio-economic status, functional ability, gender or age. An intersectional approach to fighting inequality and discrimination is therefore important. We encourage the Personal Representatives to always look at the possible multiple forms of discrimination in their analyses.

We appreciate ODIHR's support to the three Personal Representatives, as well as its support to participating States in their efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination practices. This includes my own country of Norway. We also highly appreciated the visit of Ambassador Paçacı to Norway a year ago.

Norway is a diverse society, and the government aims to protect this diversity. The authorities also have responsibility for ensuring the security of all citizens and for enacting special measures for groups who are exposed to special risk. Norway's "Action Plan against racism and discrimination based on ethnicity and religion" for the period 2020 to 2023 describes my government's efforts against violence, intolerance and discrimination nationally and internationally.

In 2016, Norway launched an action plan against anti-Semitism. It was the result of the involvement of relevant academic institutions, ministries, and the small Jewish community in Norway. This year, we have revisited this plan, and expanded it to 2023. Next year, the Government will again launch a population survey on attitudes towards Jews and other minorities in Norway, as it has done every five years since 2013.

Harassment of Muslims is a growing problem in our region. Norway is no exemption. Prejudice, anti-Muslim attitudes, and racism give rise to a sense of insecurity among Muslims. Right-wing extremism has developed in a negative direction. As a response, the Norwegian government has launched an action plan to combat discrimination and hatred towards Muslims for the period 2020 to 2023.

Cooperation with civil society is crucial for the implementation of all these action plans. Civil society does important work to strengthen the respect for and understanding of the interdependency between the different human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief. Their activities are also important to expose and prevent abuse and injustice towards minorities in society.

Tolerance and inclusion are greatly advanced when religious leaders and human rights defenders work together. We therefore encourage the Personal Representatives' broad cooperation with civil society and human rights defenders in their future work.

We look forward to further cooperation.

Thank you