



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities

statement by

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Chair of the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award Jury
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to the

2024 Max van der Stoel Award Ceremony

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Dear Laureates and Jury members,
Dear family members and friends of the late Max van der Stoel,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address you today as the Chair of the Jury of the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award at the 11th Ceremony of this Award bestowed in the name of the Dutch statesman and first High Commissioner, Max van der Stoel.

Every two years, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Government of the Netherlands organize the Max van der Stoel Award to recognize the extraordinary work of an individual, or an institution, dedicated to improving the position of national minorities in the OSCE region.

This year, our distinguished Jury unanimously selected Natur og Ungdom (Натюр og ун Дом) from Norway as the winner of the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award in recognition of their outstanding efforts to give young people of all backgrounds, including national minorities, a voice in environmental policy. Natur og Ungdom dates back to 1967: for almost 60 years it has been bringing young people from both majority and minority communities together to address environmental challenges. It has also worked tirelessly to raise awareness about how climate change affects people from all communities, including national minorities and the indigenous Sámi. Our winner today believes that as environmental challenges affect everyone, all voices – including those from minority communities – should be heard in order to effectively address the issues that affect their lives.

I would like to emphasize that during my tenure as the High Commissioner on National Minorities, much like my predecessors, I placed the participation of youth, engagement with youth and the empowerment of youth at the forefront of my agenda. This is why it was especially heart-warming for me to see this dynamic organization – an organization run for and by young people – recognized and rewarded with the Max van der Stoel Award this year.

Dear friends,

In 2024, our distinguished Jury unanimously selected Natur og Ungdom as the winner from among many other strong candidates. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to welcome the members of our jury, some of whom are here with us today.

This year has been a very difficult year for the OSCE and we have all been a witness to it. The challenges that we face today reaffirm the importance of minority issues and the need for governments and civil society to work closely together to reinforce social cohesion and build resilient societies. This is why it is even more important now to recognize initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion and integration policies and achieve this by peaceful means.

Our winner this year has demonstrated enduring commitment, effective leadership and remarkable resilience in their quest to address environmental issues that affect people in different communities, including both majority and minority communities.

Since the late 1970s, Natur og Ungdom has been advocating for issues at the intersection between the environment and Sámi rights. Its commitment to diversity and inclusion is evident in its organizational structure: Natur og Ungdom provides an effective platform for young people aged between 13 and 25 from all communities in Norway to participate in public life. They advance the interests of minorities by giving a voice to Sámi youth, empowering them to protect their rights and traditional culture, and raising public awareness about the vital role that Sámi communities play in preserving and protecting Norway's environmental heritage.

Natur og Ungdom has been highly effective in using youth activism and legal means to bring about positive change. More importantly, Natur og Ungdom ensures that its activism is peaceful and has clear objectives. I commend it for its inclusive, peaceful and effective activism, which protects, promotes and advances the interests of all people from all communities, including national minorities and indigenous peoples.

On behalf of the entire Jury, I extend my sincere congratulations to Natur og Ungdom for its well-deserved award and wish them every success in their work.

Thank you.