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PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT BY NORWAY ON THE INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile to the Permanent Council,
Vienna 31 January 2013

Mr. Chairman,

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day is important to all of us. Holocaust is part of the darkest period of European history. It is part of the history of many OSCE participating States, my own included.

Prior to World War II Norway had a Jewish population of around 2100. After the occupation of Norway in April 1940, most of them had their passports or identification cards marked with the letter "J".

During the occupation 772 of Norway's Jews, in other words one third of their total number, were deported to German extinction camps. Only 34 returned.

The deportation of these Jews was organised by Norway's own policemen. They did so without questioning the orders they had been given.

In her recent address on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Norway's Minister of Justice and Public Security, Ms. Grete Faremo, said that perhaps the most incomprehensible aspect of Holocaust are the many atrocities facilitated by ordinary citizens, who did not ask questions.

Norway was by no means unique in this respect. The same happened in many European countries. Holocaust is probably the most tragic example of our ability to look away.

But at the same time, and as in other countries, we honour those who stood up for the vulnerable and prosecuted, who protected them or helped them flee to Sweden.

Mr. Chairman,

Norway belongs to those European nations that had a public debate and also a thorough legal investigation into war crimes promptly following the end of World War II. That helped us start the process of healing the many wounds the war had created.

But some wounds remained open. It took more than 60 years before an official apology to our Jewish compatriots was delivered. It took even longer before the Norwegian Police expressed their regrets for the role they played in the deportation of our Jews.

But neither in this way is Norway unique. It takes time to overcome the agony stemming from war and war crimes. And it takes time before we are able to openly and publicly discuss questions of guilt and responsibility.

Today Holocaust inspires us to work for tolerance and non-discrimination and a meaningful integration of our national minorities as well as of those who have recently immigrated to my country.

Mr. Chairman,

We must never forget neither Holocaust nor other crimes against humanity.

Commemorating Holocaust will help us prevent a repetition of it. It will also help us understand the possible consequences of not fighting intolerance and xenophobia.

Thank you.