

**OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism,
Xenophobia and Discrimination, Brussels, 13 and 14 September 2004
Statement by the Ambassador of Norway to the OSCE,
Mrs. Mette Kongsheim**

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ENGLISH only

Mr. Chairman,

We, the OSCE participating states, have agreed on a number of important standards with a view to combat racism and ethnic discrimination. We have affirmed the importance of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and we have condemned all forms of discrimination and violence, including against any religious group or individual believer. The challenge we face, however, is how to implement these standards in practice. Norway therefore welcomes the action-oriented focus of this conference. We must set priorities for our future work, building on decisions already made. We also highly value the overarching concept of this conference, which is dialogue and partnerships towards tolerance, respect and mutual understanding. The need for action and dialogue, Mr. Chairman, should be the clear message from this conference.

The starting point for governments when dealing with racism must be to put in place an adequate legal framework. Next come practical measures, which address all residents' rights to live in a society free of racism and discrimination. In this respect it is our common obligation to increase our efforts towards the younger generation in order to build up their understanding of the need for tolerance and respect. Our education system must address how to best incorporate human rights.

In taking required measures and strengthen dialogue we all need to learn from each other, experience gathered and possible best practices in fighting the wave of racism, xenophobia and discrimination. In my country's National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination the point of departure is that Norway is a multicultural society, and that cultural plurality enriches our lives and benefits the community.

The Norwegian government has a responsibility for ensuring respect for human rights. This is enshrined in our Constitution. Norway also has legal provisions that prohibit ethnic discrimination in several areas, such as in employment, public and private services, and a prohibition against racist hate speech. We have provisions in the penal code, which make racist motivation an aggravating circumstance in violence and vandalism cases. But the legislation is fragmented so in order to get a more comprehensive approach in the legislative framework, a bill prohibiting ethnic discrimination will be submitted to the parliament in December this year. The new act will be in accordance with EU Council directives.

Furthermore, we need effective implementing bodies. The existing Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination provides legal assistance, it monitors and documents the various forms and extent of racial discrimination in Norway. It is also active in general public awareness raising. As part of the government's efforts to combat discrimination, it has been decided that gender and ethnic discrimination will be enforced by a single body: The Equality and Discrimination Ombud. The new body, which will be established in January 2006, will also be responsible for enforcing equal treatment in the labour market. We believe that this consolidation will enhance our ability to monitor the situation, and increase our capacity to investigate and follow up individual cases. The Ombud will in addition play an important role in raising awareness and promoting equality. This reform sends the message that all forms of discrimination are equally abhorrent.

We will also have a special focus on the younger generation, in particular through the school and education system, as well the Internet. Children brought up in a society based on respect and tolerance will hopefully seek peaceful solutions, while children subjected to an atmosphere of intolerance may be more prone to violence. We know only too well that violence that is rooted in racism and intolerance may have far-reaching implications ranging from the well-being of individuals to international peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,

- In concluding I would like to stress that an action oriented approach would be for OSCE Participating States to make best efforts to national legislation and enforcement mechanisms.
- Secondly, the Participating states should report on measures taken to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination, as this would provide an opportunity to review progress and to ensure that commitments are translated into action. In our view we now have to stress the importance of existing reporting mechanisms being adhered to, including the periodic reporting to CERD, ECRI and ODHIR.
- Thirdly, racism must be addressed with a wide range of actions. Racism, xenophobia and discrimination are unfortunately present in most societies and arenas. The problem must

therefore be addressed by all relevant international actors. Co-ordination should however, be sought to strengthen the message, share best practices and prevent duplication of work. In particular we would like to draw Participating States' attention to the Council of Europe, where we are, in our present capacity as chair, working on a proposal to the OSCE to establish a joint working group to better co-ordinate our efforts also on this subject.

- Finally, Mr. Chairman, without dialogue little will be achieved in practice. It will be through interfaith and intercultural dialogue to promote greater tolerance, respect and mutual understanding that the OSCE Participating states and the rest of the international community can hope to get to grips with and combat the problems we are faced with.

Thank you.