



**NORWEGIAN MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

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

As delivered by Ambassador Harald Neple, Tirana  
21 May 2013

**Session 2 - Combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions**

- The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right, and it is one of the foundations of a democratic society. In fact, the pluralism indissociable from a democratic society depends on it.
- The freedom of thought, conscience and religion is not confined to the religious majority in a country, but applies to everyone. Despite a large number of legal instruments and implementation mechanisms, however, many minorities of religion or belief are harassed, discriminated against and are deprived of their right to practice their religion or belief. Freedom of religion also includes the right not to have a religion. Furthermore it is important to underline that the right to religious freedom applies to the believers, not to the religion itself. While the human rights obligations are clear, insufficient implementation by governments is the greatest obstacle to religious freedom for people around the world today.
- Improving the situation of religious minorities is a long-term priority for Norwegian foreign policy. Therefore the Ministry last year launched a project on minorities, focusing

in particular on minorities of religion or belief. As part of the project we have prepared guidelines on the protection and promotion of the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to religious minorities, which aims to provide an informative and operative tool for the Norwegian Foreign Service.

- I would like to quote a couple of passages from the introduction to the guidelines by the ministers of foreign affairs and international development: “We know that persons who belong to a minority within a minority, are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence. Therefore our policies should always underline the principle that human rights are for all, regardless of national or ethnic origin, sex, gender identity, colour, religion or belief, language or any other status.
- Religion is a controversial subject in many countries, and addressing religious issues can entail risks for those involved. Human rights defenders who work to uphold freedom of religion or belief should enjoy the protection and support that follows from relevant UN resolutions, such as the landmark Resolution on Protecting Human Rights defenders adopted by the Human Rights Council in March.”
- My American colleague mentioned the important work of the three special rapporteurs on combating religious intolerance. Last year they visited Norway, and their extensive report with recommendations has caused headlines in Norwegian media as well as debate in the Norwegian Parliament. The report draws a relatively positive picture of understanding and positive attitudes among Norwegians in general, but it certainly also points out that there are plenty of examples of religious intolerance in Norway. We take this report seriously, and we will cooperate with the relevant expertise in the OSCE family when it comes to further follow-up of the different recommendations.