



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT BY NORWAY

As delivered by Ambassador Hans Fredrik Lehne to the 2012 Human Dimension implementation meeting, Warsaw 3 October 2012 – Working Session 14

Thank you, Madame Moderator,

Racism and xenophobia remain among the most dangerous forms of discrimination. They pose a challenge to democracy and democratic institutions if not addressed. More than ever it is important to confront extremist ideologies, prejudices and stereotypes of cultural and religious intolerance in the public debate and to bring out the counter-arguments.

During the terrorist attacks in Norway last year 77 people were killed. The attacks were politically fuelled by hate towards a multicultural society, different religions, cultures and individual rights. They represented an attack on Norway both as a democratic society and on our values based on equality, non-discrimination and other fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Our response to this is to intensify our resolve for more democracy, more openness and more inclusiveness.

We must strengthen our efforts to ensure that terms like cultural diversity and multiculturalism are associated with mutual respect, tolerance and the freedom of the individual to make his or her own choices – independent of ethnicity, religion and cultural heritage.

We must continuously fight misperceptions and stigmas attached to minorities of any kind, be it ethnic, religious or sexual minorities, and spare no efforts in empowering each individual to make his or her own choices as to how to live their lives.

The main battle against racism, racial discrimination and intolerance has to be fought at the national level. Norway's national action plan to promote equality and prevent ethnic discrimination (2009-2012) has 66 different measures with the involvement of eight government ministries. The action plan highlights the following three points:

- It is imperative to combat prejudices and racial discrimination through dialogue and open public debate.
- It is equally important to create an inclusive learning environment in kindergartens and schools that is free of racism, discrimination, bullying and violence, and an education system that reflects the diversity of the population.
- It is more important than ever to confront prejudice and stereotypes that foster cultural and religious intolerance in the public debate and to present sound counter-arguments.

Racism and discrimination cannot be eliminated without focused long-term efforts by national authorities. Such efforts must include adoption - and implementation - of administrative and legislative measures, including the establishment of independent national institutions specialised in combating discrimination and promoting equality.

At the same time, co-ordinated international efforts are vital. History holds too many examples of mistrust and conflict based on religious discrimination and intolerance. Such discrimination is often based on ignorance and fear of the unknown. We must counter it through increased knowledge, tolerance and inter-cultural dialogue. It is therefore crucial that the international community continues to find common approaches to address discrimination based on religion or belief, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Norway is a small country. There are limits to what we can achieve on our own. We are searching for partners internationally, through the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and we are asking whether there are gaps in the normative framework that should be filled or initiatives that should be taken. Civil society has vital competence and, even more important, contacts on the ground.

Thank you