



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

As delivered by Ambassador Harald Neple, Tirana
21 May 2013

- Minister, Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,
- Let me join previous speakers in thanking Albania for having taken the initiative and for hosting this conference and the chairmanship and ODIHR for organizing it.
- In the OSCE area, we are witnessing an upsurge of different forms of intolerance, such as anti-Semitism, islamophobia, racism and other forms of negative stereotyping of “the others”. We have to actively combat this in order to create a “we”.
- Every day, we witness violence, hostility, intolerance and discriminatory attitudes affecting different minority groups, be it based on their actual or perceived nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, religion or belief. This is an OSCE-wide phenomenon. No country is immune.
- Against this background, the organisation of a conference on tolerance and non-discrimination is both timely and of crucial importance. Combating intolerance and discrimination is critical to the protection of the human rights, fundamental freedoms and inherent dignity of all, and it is also in complete accordance with existing OSCE commitments.

- I find it, however, important to emphasise that human rights are for all. They apply to all persons regardless of race or nationality, age or gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. Thus, Norway believe that holding a conference on tolerance and non-discrimination while deliberately excluding from the agenda the fight against certain forms of discrimination, such as discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, is contrary to the very objective of this conference and to the fundamental values of the OSCE - one of the basic principles of which is the equal dignity of every human being, regardless of their characteristics.
- We must take effective measures to address and combat intolerance and discrimination against all persons, including LGBT persons, other minorities and vulnerable groups. The ability of governments and international organisations to protect the rights of all citizens, including different minorities, is the ultimate test for our common democratic values.
- The challenges at hand are not insurmountable, but can be overcome through joining our efforts and continuing and enhancing our engagement in this field. The challenges presented by intolerance and discrimination are transnational in nature, and thus require collective action and common solutions.
- We must counter intolerance and discrimination, which is often based on ignorance and fear of the unknown, through building trust and confidence between different groups and individuals in our multicultural societies. It is vital to increase knowledge and raise awareness of other cultures and religions. Education and dialogue can often be the best antidote to hate and intolerance. Countries and regions that build upon trust and cooperation, and take advantage of diversity, will be better equipped to tackle the challenges at hand.
- When developing a strategy to respond to different forms of intolerance and discrimination, it is also crucial that we have sufficient information and data to secure

appropriate policy responses and informed decision-making. We need more knowledge, targeted research and broader analyses.

- Systematic and recurrent collection of standardised and comparable data will not only benefit policy makers on a national and regional level, but could feed into broader frameworks on a global level, enabling information sharing and facilitating positive synergies. Intolerance and discrimination threatening human rights and democratic principles are not limited to the OSCE context. We see similar challenges all over the world, and can therefore benefit from addressing crosscutting issues and analysing trends from a broader perspective.
- This realisation is why the Norwegian Government last week sought to gather a broad range of actors at the conference entitled “Right-wing Extremism and Hate Crime: Minorities under Pressure in Europe and Beyond”. The Conference brought together more than 150 experts and academics from over 25 European countries and 70 organisations, including the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.
- The discussions at the Oslo Conference focused on many of the same issues that we will discuss here today. I therefore hope that the findings from the Oslo Conference, which I will elaborate on tomorrow, may contribute to our discussions.
- Let me end my intervention by assuring you that the Norwegian Government will remain a strong partner in the fight against discrimination and intolerance. We stand ready to work with all relevant stakeholders, and we are committed to step up our engagement in this field.
- Thank you very much for the attention.