

Statement by Norwegian State Secretary  
Mr Torgeir Larsen  
at the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council,  
Vilnius, 6-7 December 2011

**Mr Chairman,**

Allow me first to commend you and your team for your efforts and achievements at the helm of the OSCE in 2011.

Norway believes that the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security is fundamental. The continued security of the OSCE area is therefore – in our view - directly related to the implementation of obligations in all three dimensions. Genuine security both between and within states is only sustainable when there is individual security, founded on democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

**Mr Chairman,**

I would like to highlight Norway's main priorities for the year ahead.

Firstly, we must strengthen the OSCE's capacity and relevance in acting effectively across the entire conflict cycle. Recent events illustrate that we must give our Chairman greater authority to respond quickly.

Secondly, in order to make the OSCE more effective we have to better reflect the political and strategic requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and adapt our agreements and instruments accordingly.

We welcome the updating and strengthening of the Vienna Document, and the decisions adopted so far. These are steps in the right direction, but more needs to be done.

We regret that talks on a framework for negotiations to strengthen and modernise the conventional arms control regime did not succeed, but we will continue to take active part in further efforts to develop a platform for a modern arms control system - responding to Europe's needs of today.

Thirdly, the human dimension with particular emphasis on the freedom of expression. This fundamental right is key for the realisation of other basic democratic rights – such as freedom of assembly, access to information and free and fair elections. These fundamental rights, which are under increased pressure within the OSCE area, must be protected.

Norway was this summer hit by terror inspired by intolerance and hate. We must fight extremist ideologies, and the only way we can succeed is through more democracy, rule of law and transparency without naivety.

We fully support the solid work done by our election observation teams. We urge the participating States to engage in a formalised follow-up procedure on the recommendations made by ODIHR and others in their election observation reports.

Fourthly, in order to tackle the root causes of conflicts in the OSCE area, the rights of national minorities must be respected and duly taken into account. Norway fully shares the High Commissioner's view that the Bolzano/Bozen recommendations should be endorsed by governments, making them politically binding.

Finally, we support the promotion of gender equality across all dimensions and at all levels of the organisation. We welcome the Irish intention to renew the OSCE gender action plan.

**Mr Chairman,**

Allow me to underline that Norway supports a strengthening of the OSCE's engagement with and in Afghanistan. We also believe that the OSCE should stand ready to assist our partners in the Mediterranean region. We support Mongolia's aspiration to become a participating State of the OSCE.

As a last point, I would like to welcome the Swiss and the Serbian offers to assume the Chairmanships in 2014 and 2015 - and extend our best wishes to Ireland in 2012 and Ukraine in 2013. You will have Norway's full support in developing the OSCE into an even more useful tool for dialogue and cooperation.

**Thank you, Mr Chairman.**