



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**Statement delivered by Ambassador Mette Kongsheim at the OSCE Tolerance
Implementation Meeting on promoting Inter-cultural, Inter-religious and Inter-Ethnic
Understanding.**

Almaty, 12 – 13 June 2006

**Session IV : The way forward: Strengthening the role of the OSCE in facilitating inter-
cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding through dialogue and
partnerships.**

Mr. Moderator,

As we have been reminded of during these couple of days, acts of xenophobia, hate crimes, marginalization, stereotyping and defamation against ethnic, religious and other minorities have shown a deeply worrying increase over the last years. We see instances of mocking and caricaturing sacred beliefs and values. And we also see a most disturbing receptivity towards such acts of intolerance. How to counter these tendencies and developments and to pursue our common vision of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings is called for more than ever. It is a question of upholding basic human rights.

A wise man once said that human beings are enemies of things they do not know about. There is a lot of truth in that statement. Ignorance and fear seems in many cases to be a prime motivation behind acts of intolerance.

In fostering understanding and tolerance, education and the media are indeed important instruments. The message that we will want to convey, is that cultural and religious diversity is indeed enriching our societies, and that an inclusive and participatory civil society will breed mutual respect and understanding. We must uphold the vision of a society that finds unity in diversity and where all groups benefit mutually from each other.

The OSCE is well equipped with institutions and mechanisms which can assist participating States in furthering a tolerance agenda. Norway believes that what is called for is a more coordinated and comprehensive OSCE strategy. The OSCE's contribution to the agenda of tolerance could in our view be further strengthened by concentrating all available resources and avoid proliferation of structures. A strong political will for concerted action is called for, and has been underlined by several speakers and delegations.

We must pull together and define our priorities, in full compliance with already agreed norms and decisions in combating intolerance and discrimination. Commitments and statements must be converted into action.

As we see it, the role of the OSCE could be strengthened i.a. in the following areas:

OSCE should through the Representative of the Media develop projects aimed at highlighting the need for responsible public discussions through the media to promote tolerance, integration and understanding. The media can play an important role in contributing to informing the public at large of cultures and civilizations. Information leads to increased awareness and understanding, which in turn lessen the fear of the unknown.

OSCE should also through the ODIHR enhance its education-programme as a tool for combating all forms of intolerance and discrimination. In particular we should focus on educational approaches tailored for the young generation, shaping attitudes of tolerance and respect through inter-religious and inter-cultural exchanges and contacts among young people - and encourage the establishment of joint projects as mentioned by professor Durham. Also, the proposal put forward by Anna Kreikemeyer on a meeting of OSCE ministers of education to discuss the promotion of education in tolerance is indeed interesting.

The OSCE should furthermore, through the High Commissioner for National Minorities, strengthen its work on new minorities in established democracies in the OSCE area, in order to assist them to integrate into the societies of their new homeland by facilitating active inclusion, engagement and participation.

The OSCE should also actively draw on existing networks and relevant international partners, such as the Council of Europe, ECRI, EUMC, the OIC and the UN. Several Permanent Council decisions have tasked the ODIHR to follow closely, in full cooperation with other OSCE institutions and international organizations and NGOs, incidents motivated by racism, discrimination and intolerance, report such findings to the Permanent Council and make the findings public. This early warning mechanism could be further refined and strengthened, through recommendations on how to address such incidents.

In this way Mr. Moderator, the OSCE will provide a unique platform for solidarity and acceptance of our diverse cultural, religious and historic experiences and backgrounds.

Let me conclude by appealing to the ODIHR to work closely with participating States, in order to facilitate the creation of national action plans in the fight against all forms of intolerance. The implementation of national action plans will be a concrete follow up of the principles endorsed in Berlin, Paris, Brussels and Cordoba – as well as of the thought and ideas during these two days.

I thank you Mr. Moderator.