



PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
STATEMENT BY MR. LARS SIGURD VALVATNE
SENIOR ADVISER,
NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS II
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Mr. Moderator,

In Norway, this year has been an intense year of reflection and dialogue in relation to religion. The controversy following the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad highlighted questions of human rights; freedom of conscience and of speech. In a vulnerable and challenging situation, we benefited from years of dialogue experience and relationships developed over time. Norway has had an active interreligious council since the 1990s; a meeting place for discussion and critical questions, confidence and cooperation. Bilateral religious dialogues had been going on for years already when the cartoon controversy challenged our sense of unity.

The controversy reminded us of the importance of dialogue, even in peaceful times. It reminded us of the importance of relationships that cross borders. And it revealed with all clarity that religious identity is important, that religious feelings and deep-felt truths must be respected. Yet we also learnt the

importance of acknowledging each other's multifaceted identities: Christians and Muslims in Norway are not *only* Christians or Muslims. They are fathers and mothers, young and old. Muslims in Norway shared the hurt they felt when the cartoons were published, yet they also took a stand for the freedom of speech, and against violence.

Mr.Moderator

The freedom of conscience and belief can never be purely intellectual. Our values determine our actions. Faith results in practice. A freedom of religion that does not allow for believers and non-believers to live as they learn is not a true freedom of religion.

Individuals do sometimes attempt to impose their own standards on others. Criminal acts have been committed in the name of God. In those cases we must be brave and make a clear stand: No abuse and no crime should be accepted in the name of a religion or an ideology.

The individual must be free to believe or refrain from believing, and to act in coherence with his or her conscience.. We must defend the liberty of conscience. Only a society that values that liberty will see honesty and true dialogue arise. The liberty of religion or belief must be protected, even in cases where it implies conversion. We still hear of persecution due to divergent world views or conversion. This we cannot accept.

Mr Moderator,

The freedom of religion or belief does not, however, imply a right to be protected from criticism nor ridicule. But we must strive for sensitivity and mutual respect. We must facilitate meetings across borders and work for enhanced understanding between people. We must join our efforts to create an

open and inviting atmosphere amongst us. We cherish the freedom of speech, even when untrue or unwise words are spoken. Our democratic societies are founded on the freedom of speech, as well as on the freedom of conscience. We cannot live without these freedoms. We cannot stop the critical dialogue.

Mr. Moderator,

The OSCE has taken a commendable lead in protecting the right to religion and belief. Norway appreciates the work of the Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office. We are also grateful for the work undertaken by the ODIHRs Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion and Belief.