



**PERMANENT DELEGATION  
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT OF NORWAY IN RESPONSE TO THE ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY  
GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION**

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
29<sup>th</sup> November, 2012

**Mr. Chairman,**

I aligned myself with the statement made by my distinguished colleague of Cyprus, on behalf of the European Union. In my national capacity I would like to make a few additional remarks, inspired by Secretary General Ihsanoğlu's points on intolerance, discrimination and Islamophobia.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Before I took up my assignment in Vienna in September last year, I served as Norway's ambassador to Pakistan. During my tenure I developed a close relationship and dialogue with many religious leaders, representing the different schools of Islam as well as among the Christian minority. I visited many mosques and madrasas in different parts of the country. I did my best to learn about Islam, including through reading the Koran from the first to the last page.

Many of the religious leaders I met were working for interfaith harmony and tolerance. But not all of them.

I was dismayed by the intolerance towards and bad treatment of the vulnerable Christian minority. I was surprised to see how little the political leaders did to help these people out of their slums and out of poverty.

But I was shocked to witness the hatred and violence between the schools of Islam. During my years in Pakistan several Shia mosques were attacked by Sunnis, always during Friday prayers. In May 2010 94 persons belonging to the Ahmadiyya School of thought were gunned down, again during Friday prayers. Outside Lahore I once visited an institution belonging to one Sunni sect burned down by a mob from another Sunni sect.

In January 2011 Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer and two months later Minister of minorities and the government's only Christian member, Shahbaz Bhatti, were assassinated by religious bigots. They had both spoken in favour of *discussing aspects* of the draconian blasphemy law of Pakistan.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The religious intolerance we witness in European countries is far away from what I met in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, a prominent member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

This does not mean that I underestimate the danger of Islamophobia in Europe, Norway included. On the contrary, it is widespread and it can be fuelled by the current economic crisis. And it is dangerous: 22. July last year 77 people were brutally murdered in my country, by a Norwegian Islamophob.

**Mr. Chairman,**

The fight against discrimination, Islamophobia, Christianophobia and Antisemitism will be successful only if we manage to launch concerted action. This means that our governments must understand and take seriously their responsibility. It means that our multilateral organizations must play their role, as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation does. I would believe that we all agree that the OSCE is well placed to make a difference, and therefore I fail to understand why a comprehensive and well balanced draft ministerial decision on efforts to fight racism and xenophobia is met with opposition from some participating States.

But, **Mr. Chairman**, in my own country we see how civil society plays a powerful role in promoting tolerance. Private persons, all kinds of organizations and associations, among them many representing immigrant communities, make full use of their right of freedom of expression, not least through digital media, and their freedom of assembly and thereby stifle the voices of intolerance.

Thank you, **Mr. Chairman**