



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

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

Almaty, 12 – 13 June 2006

**Session II : Inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic partnerships as a tool to
counter stereotypes and prejudice and to promote mutual respect and understanding in
public and political discourse.**

Mr. Moderator,

Allow me on behalf of the Norwegian Delegation to congratulate our Kazakh hosts for their excellent organisation of this important meeting, and for their warm hospitality. I would also like to pay tribute to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, whose presence at the meeting is a clear sign of significance Kazakhstan attaches to the topic of our deliberations today and tomorrow. It is indeed appropriate that this meeting takes place in Kazakhstan, a country well known for its inter-ethnic and inter-faith accord and dialogue.

It is the hope and expectation of the Norwegian government that our discussions will provide an important contribution to policy making and further cooperation between various national and international actors.

Mr. Moderator,

The cartoon controversy that erupted earlier this year was an eye-opener for many of us. It made us realize the complexities and the sensitivities surrounding the role that religious faiths and cultural traditions play in international as well as in domestic politics. It also made us well aware of the fact that foreign and domestic policies are tightly interwoven in our globalized world.

What we experienced during the cartoon controversy, was that where networks of cooperation and dialogue already had been well established and commitment to a dialogue of trust existed, the crisis was easier to deal with. Dialogue, partnership and respect for human dignity must be our guiding principles in combating prejudice and threats to tolerance.

Inter-faith, inter-cultural and inter-ethnic dialogue must take place at all levels, national as well as international. Partners for cooperation in these efforts must include not only governments, but also parliamentarians, spokespersons for different faiths as well as committed representatives of civil society and members of civil rights movements. In embracing diversity and multi-culturalism we must stimulate and engage diverse voices. Reaching out, as you said Mr. Moderator, is so important – reaching out also to potential partners.

Tolerance has become the catch word of our common and collective action. How can we best define this concept? We would argue that tolerance is a measure of recognition and respect for different arguments and values on the basis of equality. Tolerance must start at home and be nurtured through education and upbringing. Respect is the first step in identifying and developing criteria for good practices in combating intolerance and discrimination. Tolerance should be mainstreamed through our societies.

Mr. Moderator,

Different civilisations and cultures do not have an inherent propensity for conflict. Our goal must be to create multi-cultural societies where extremists and populist movements exploiting the perception of “us” and “them” – do not get hold of peoples’ minds.

Norway believes that in order to prevent acts of ignorance and distrust, we must stimulate a dialogue of partnership and respect for “the other”. Political will and engagement are vital elements, as are close co-operation between various initiatives at all levels; governments, international organizations and civil society. We need a comprehensive and coherent approach in order to create thorough understanding and respect for different ideas, opinions, cultures and religious beliefs. We must learn to live together as was pointed out by Dr. Ibrahim Kalin.

As possible examples of good practices, let me mention a few measures that my country has explored. As part of our foreign policy we are providing financial resources for inter-religious dialogue, supporting projects to promote dialogue between religious leaders in conflict areas. We have taken initiatives aimed at improving relations between people from different cultures and with different religious beliefs. Earlier this year we also established a Forum for Religion and Foreign Policy, where issues related to religion, peace and conflict prevention are being discussed.

Norway also give priority to include topics related to the role of religion on the international political agenda. And we furthermore provide support to relevant research and competence building efforts. Furthermore we support Norwegian organizations dedicated to fostering freedom of religion and beliefs, working on building platforms for dialogue and co-operation with partners of religions in different regions.

My government is also supporting dialogue between media-representatives of different regions. One example was the recent Arabic Nordic dialogue where Nordic and Muslim journalists discussed their perspectives on journalism, freedom of expression, portrayal of “the other “ in the media, as well as their perceptions of cultural diversity, and how the experience from the events surrounding the publication of the cartoons could ultimately lead to a more attentive and better understanding of diverging perspectives. The event was a success and will be followed up with similar dialogues between media people from different backgrounds on related topics.

In such ways Mr. Moderator, Norway is trying to chart a course for contributing to creating a culture of respect through dialogue and partnership. Human dignity and human rights are the values that must guide our common efforts.

Thank you.