



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL
MINORITIES, AMBASSADOR KNUT VOLLEBÆK**

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
26 June 2008

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation is no less pleased than others to welcome Ambassador Knut Vollebæk back to the Permanent Council for his second report as High Commissioner on National Minorities, which we found both thorough and interesting.

We are impressed by the high level of activity of the office, as reflected in the breathtaking programme of visits and contacts, and we welcome the good cooperation established with both governments and other stakeholders.

Norway underlines her support for the important work carried out by the High Commissioner as an instrument for safeguarding human rights, as well as for early warning and conflict prevention. We fully subscribe to the support voiced by the European Union and others for the various activities presented in the report.

On this occasion, we would in particular like to commend the institution of High Commissioner on National Minorities for the very worthwhile efforts laid down in compiling and developing a set of *Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations*. National minorities, with all their positive features, can also be a source of conflicts between states, and it is therefore eminently a natural part of the High Commissioner's mandate to develop a set of guidelines for inter-state relations seeking to avoid and minimize such conflicts.

In this context, it is appropriate to also pay a special tribute to the former High Commissioner Rolf Ekéus and to the Venice Commission for their prior contributions, since the recommendations presented here today build on their invaluable work. Norway firmly believes that these recommendations will be of great importance in the promotion of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and in improving trust and cooperation between the States belonging to this organisation.

Mr. Chairman,

We agree with the High Commissioner that States have the main responsibility to protect and promote the rights of national minorities under their jurisdiction, as well as to act as responsible members of the international community with regard to national minorities under the jurisdiction of another State. Like the High Commissioner, we strongly believe that States should be guided by the basic principles of international law and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other States.

The recommendations are, as pointed out by the High Commissioner, a living document, to be adapted and refined to meet changing circumstances and emerging new challenges. The *Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities*, whose tenth anniversary was appropriately celebrated with a conference on that subject in Oslo last week, serve as a good example of that, together with the other sets of recommendations developed by the office of the HCNM.

Norway looks forward to taking active part in the discussions when *the Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations* are formally launched in Bolzano in September this year.

In closing, Norway recognises the uniqueness of the High Commissioner's mandate in conflict prevention and early warning and the challenges that this creates. We assure the High Commissioner of our strong support for his office in protecting minority interests and defusing potential conflict situations related to minority issues across the OSCE region, and we will continue our close cooperation with Ambassador Vollebæk and his dedicated and competent staff.

Thank you Mr. Chairman