

**STATEMENT BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF NORWAY,
MR. JAN PETERSEN,
AT THE 12th OSCE MINISTERIAL MEETING IN SOFIA,
6 DECEMBER 2004**

Mr. Chairman,

There can be no democracy without free and fair elections. The decision of the Supreme Court of Ukraine to declare the elections invalid is a major victory for the rule of law. Ukraine has now a unique opportunity to ensure that the will of the people is respected. ODIHR's continued support to the elections in Ukraine is very important.

The Bulgarian Chairmanship has put reform high on the agenda, and rightly so. We need concrete proposals to adapt the organisation to changing realities. Our work should focus on areas where the OSCE can bring added value. The emphasis on human rights and the rule of law must be upheld. We must now take a closer look at the functioning of our organisation. I welcome the proposal to establish a Panel of Eminent Persons and we are looking forward to their recommendations.

In addition, the role of the Secretary General must be strengthened. The decision we will take tomorrow is a first, positive step.

We have agreed to intensify cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe. This will benefit both organisations. We need to avoid overlap and to create synergies. I believe in concrete and target-oriented co-operation.

Human capital is the main asset of the OSCE. As we endorse the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, it is my understanding that we also agree to provide the resources needed for its implementation.

We are deeply committed to preventing and combating trafficking in human beings. Trafficking of children is the worst of crimes. There should be zero-tolerance for trafficking and sexual exploitation in international operations.

The tragedies in Madrid and Beslan have brutally reminded us of the threat terrorism poses to our open societies. No cause, however worthy, can justify the killing of innocent people. We must continue our fight against terrorism, in accordance with international law and human rights obligations. The approach

of the OSCE should supplement and support the work of other international organisations.

Tensions between people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds are growing. Promoting tolerance and non-discrimination is crucial. The OSCE has an important role to play in order to support participating states in this respect.

The future of the Southern Caucasus depends to a great extent on solutions to the “frozen” conflicts. The international community must contribute as facilitator, but the main responsibility rests with the parties concerned. Commitments and decisions taken at the highest level in Istanbul should be implemented without delay.

One year ago we met at a moment of fundamental change in Georgia. Today I am impressed by the country’s commitment to reform. Democracy works. Norway will continue to assist Georgia in strengthening democracy and the rule of law.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for the excellent work by you and your team during your term as Chairman-in-Office. I look forward to cooperating closely with our Slovenian colleague next year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.