



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING 2009
Norwegian Statement for the Working Session 5: Tolerance and Non-discrimination I
As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik,
Permanent Delegation of Norway to the OSCE
Warsaw, 30 September 2009

Thank you, Madam Moderator

Let me first join previous speakers in welcoming the High Commissioner, Ambassador Vollebæk, back to the HDIM. The existence of sizable national minorities is the rule rather than the exception in our countries. Whatever their history and background, national minorities enrich our societies in various ways. But at times, conflicts may also arise around the treatment of national minorities, and if we look around, we will indeed find that most of the protracted, and brewing, conflicts in our area have something to do with national minorities. That is why the institution of High Commissioner on National Minorities is so important, with its mandate for protection of human rights and early warning of possible emerging conflicts, as well as conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

We would therefore in particular like to commend the High Commissioner for the efforts laid down in establishing a set of **Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations**. Norway firmly believes that the Bolzano-Bozen recommendations are of great value in ensuring the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and, perhaps even more important, in promoting trust and cooperation between States.

Prevention is always better than cure, and in seeking to avoid conflicts involving national minorities, it is of crucial importance to promote the participation of minorities in cultural, social and economic life, as well as in political and public affairs, as stated in Article 5 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. In democracies based on majority decisions there is a need for mechanisms that ensure that the minorities' interests are

taken duly into account. A democracy is not a true democracy if only the majority's voices are heard and represented.

In his last presentation to the OSCE Permanent Council in June, and again here today, the High Commissioner very pertinently focussed on the importance of education as one of the main instruments in promoting integration. We also believe that schools, as meeting places for different cultures, religions and ethnicities, are where foundation stones for integration are laid. The culture, language and identity of national minorities should be considered an important and valuable part of the cultural heritage of the nation state, and thus be reflected in the education system. Recognition and visibility of the minorities' languages and cultures as equal to the culture and language of the majority can be an important contribution to build peace and reduce the potential for conflict.

Norway believes that it is important to ensure that minorities both receive mother tongue education and learn the State language, as emphasised in the Oslo Recommendations regarding the linguistic rights of national Minorities.

In closing we reiterate our full support to the High Commissioner and his office.

Thank you, Madam Moderator