



## PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

### STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

As delivered by Counsellor Hilde Austad

to SHDM on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in Economic Crisis

Vienna, 30th October 2014

Mr Chairman,

We thank the Swiss Chairmanship for convening this timely meeting on human rights and fundamental freedoms in economic crises.

For Norway one basic principle is clear: Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are of equal importance. Human Rights are interdependent and indivisible. This should always be the point of departure.

Mr Chairman,

In times of political crisis and economic hardship, as some participating States recently have experienced, rights tend to come under pressure. It is therefore paramount to establish structures and systems ensuring the fulfilment of individual human rights that also hold in times of crisis. These structures can be laws, independent judiciary, affordable access to justice, ombudsman institutions, national human rights institutions or other permanent institutions that will maintain their position and strength through economic downturns.

It is true that recession may constitute a challenge for governments in fulfilling their obligations concerning certain economic, social and cultural rights, as health and education. But this is also a question of priority. Economic problems must never be an excuse for governments to take their obligations lightly.

Civil and political rights can also come under pressure in economic crisis. Economic hardship, unemployment and social unrest can lead to shrinking space for human rights defenders and

restrictions on freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of association. As we have witnessed so often, these restrictions do not calm social tensions, but aggravate them. In times of economic crisis, governments need to be more aware of human rights implications of their policies, not less.

Mr Chairman,

In times of crisis, vulnerable groups, as disabled persons, refugees, immigrants and minorities, are far too often the first to experience the negative effects. As States, it is our duty to be mindful of this and proactively take steps to safeguard these groups. Promoting tolerance, inclusion and a feeling of community in good times is the best insurance against intolerance when crisis hits.

We are looking forward to listening to the high-level presenters, and to learn from experiences elsewhere, in order to continue to improve our own systems and structures.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.