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ENGLISH only

PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

Norwegian statement in response to the report by the Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions; on Combating Anti-Semitism; and on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 15 November 2012

Mr. Chairman,

I join others in thanking the three personal representatives for their substantive reports, including on my own country.

I fully support the points made by Cyprus on behalf of the European Union in support of the activities of the personal representatives on combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Their work is truly important, and I urge the chairmanship to make sure that the representatives have sufficient funding, as well as support from the Secretariat, in carrying out their activities.

The representatives visited Norway in June this year, conducting a long series of meetings. This resulted in a draft report on which we have had the opportunity to make comments. A very positive stage was set already in the opening line of the report: “Norway is an exemplary state that both espouses a commitment to human rights and equality and seeks to implement these goals in practice”.

I am proud on behalf of my government for such a statement. But I would much have preferred to hear that Norway works diligently in order to fulfil her commitments on these and other related topics, because, as stated later in the draft report, Norway faces several challenges related to racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

Mr. Chairman,

Norway has five national minorities and one indigenous people, the Sámi. These groups suffered under a rather aggressive assimilation policy that was abandoned from the 1960s on. As Norway slowly changed her policy towards the minorities and the Sami indigenous people, we faced the beginning of an influx of people also of non-European origin.

Immigration has changed Norway. Today 13.1 % of the Norwegian population are immigrants, half of them from non-European countries. The Pakistanis, Somalis and Iraqis are the three largest groups from beyond Europe. In our capital Oslo 28 % of the inhabitants are immigrants.

The fairly homogenous Norway of my childhood is now a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious society.

It goes without saying that such a change has caused frictions. The report of the three representatives' visit to Norway in June lists examples of such frictions, also with regard to anti-Semitism. It furthermore offers six recommendations to my government for ways to improve and for areas where OSCE and ODIHR have experience and can offer assistance.

Mr. Chairman,

The report and the recommendations have caused a public debate in Norway and aspects of it have been raised in Parliament. Let me quote Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide on the anti-Semitism allegations of the report. He said: "As a good, well-functioning and democratic society, we are measured according to how we treat our minorities. And anti-Semitism is a sign of illness. Norway shall be a nation where all people can live in safety." End of quote.

Mr. Chairman,

No multiethnic society avoids frictions, nor do we. We are grateful to the representatives for their recommendations and we take them seriously. We are now carefully studying them, and we will report back to the Human Dimension Committee on our cooperation with ODIHR on targeted issues in the report.

I urge other participating States to report in the same way on their follow up to recommendations from the representatives.

Mr. Chairman, I wish the personal representatives all the best in their future work.

Thank you