



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 22 January 2015

Mr Chairman,

Last year Norway celebrated the 200th anniversary of our constitution. In 1814 it was regarded as one of the most modern and democratic in Europe, inspired by the French revolution and the American Declaration of Independence. Still, one of its articles stated that Jews were not allowed to enter the kingdom.

During the Second World War, when Norway was occupied by Nazi Germany, 772 Norwegian Jews, one third of the total Jewish population of Norway at that time, were deported to Germany. Only 34 survived. The deportation of the Jews was carried out by Norway's own police officers, who followed the orders they had been given by the occupants. In 2012 Norway's Prime Minister found it fitting to express his deepest apologies that this could happen in our country.

These are two examples from our history. But perhaps some of the ideas behind these examples of anti-Semitism and discrimination against Jews still persist.

Mr Chairman,

A recent survey found that anti-Semitic views and stereotypes still exist among Norwegians. Regrettably, there are indications of anti-Semitic sentiments also in minority groups in Norway, even in the younger generation.

Today our Jewish community is small, approximately 1500 people, and extremely well integrated. Perhaps for this reason there has not been much attention to countering anti-Semitism until recently. Still, all forms of anti-Semitism must be taken seriously and tackled.

We are working on this in different ways.

A Centre for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities was established in Oslo some 15 years ago. Symbolically, it is located in the war-time residence of the

Norwegian collaborator and Nazi leader Vidkun Quisling. Here schoolchildren and the public can learn about Jewish culture, the Holocaust and how to prevent this from happening again. Researchers are uncovering new documentation and providing new analysis.

Mr Chairman,

The ceremony to mark the International Holocaust Remembrance Day is held every year at the harbour in Oslo, at the very site of the deportations in 1942. Representatives of the Royal Family and the government take part to keep this memory alive.

Mr Chairman,

Last September, our American colleague invited us to be part of a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Seeing the camps, the fences, the gas chambers, the ovens with my own eyes made a deep and lasting impression on me. Every year a few thousand Norwegian schoolchildren have the same experience. On the very day of my own visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau there were several Norwegian school classes visiting the camps. Many of these school classes have been accompanied by Norwegian concentration camp survivors, to hear first-hand about daily life, and death, in the camps. Only a couple of weeks after my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau I saw an interview on television with one of these survivors. He had just returned home from a trip to the camp with a school class. He said: I have accompanied school classes to the camps more than 100 times. This time – I believe – was the last one. I am, after all, 90 years old.

Chairman,

These trips are part of our efforts to teach new generations about the Holocaust, and about the horrific consequences of hate and intolerance.

Mr Chairman,

The Holocaust was extreme in every way. One of the factors that made it possible was the prejudice and hatred that was stirred up among ordinary people beforehand. We honour the victims by increasing our efforts to fight all forms of discrimination and intolerance to ensure that something like this will never happen again.

Thank you, Mr Chairman