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Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

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Ambassador
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Norway is deeply committed to the combat against racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance. Our commitment to the follow-up of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action is evident in Norway’s national action plan to promote equality and prevent ethnic discrimination.

The right to protection against discrimination applies equally to all groups and all individuals, whether they belong to ethnic or religious minorities, or have a sexual orientation or gender identity that differ from the mainstream, or for any other reason. Women, who make up half of the world population, are among those who suffer the most from multiple forms of discrimination. This is simply not acceptable. The ability of governments to protect the rights of all citizens, including different minorities, is the ultimate test for our common democratic values.

The challenges at hand are not insurmountable, but can be overcome through joining our efforts and continuing and enhancing our engagement in this field. In May this year Norway organised an international conference to discuss the challenges and possible solutions related to the rise of right-wing extremism and hate crime directed towards minorities in Europe and beyond. We also brought the debate to the UN high-level meetings in September when we dedicated our annual Trygve Lie Symposium to one of these challenges: How to combat hate speech.

Hate speech is not new. But greater access to Internet and increasing use of social media are making hate speech more visible and easier to spread.

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The solution is however not censorship. On the contrary: the best way to answer hate speech is actually more speech. Freedom of assembly and freedom of expression have proven to be more powerful than any other tool in the fight against racism.

We need to confront extremist ideologies, prejudices and stereotypes of cultural and religious intolerance in the public debate and to bring out the counter-arguments. Governments and politicians must clearly and unequivocally condemn manifestations of hate in public discourse and acts of violence based on prejudice and negative stereotyping.

Racism and discrimination cannot be eliminated without focused long-term efforts by national authorities. Such efforts must include adoption - and implementation - of administrative and legislative measures, including the establishment of independent national institutions specialized in combating discrimination and promoting equality.

At the same time, coordinated international efforts are vital. History holds too many examples of mistrust and conflict based on religious discrimination and intolerance. Such discrimination is often based on ignorance and fear of the unknown. Increased knowledge, inter-cultural dialogue, tolerance and respect for diversity are essential. The international community must continue to find common approaches to address discrimination based on religion or belief. A main concern must be those whose rights are particularly at risk, among them persons belonging to religious minorities.

The responsibility for bringing the fight against discrimination forward lies with the leaders of each country. And with each of us as human beings.

The only effective way to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is to constantly insist on and require unconditional respect for the human dignity and the human rights of everyone, by everyone, everywhere and at all times.

Thank you.