

UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Minister Solveig Horne, UN Geneva 17.08.15

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Mr. Chair,

Members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present Norway's report here today.

50 years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Today, we can surely say that it was a future-oriented work that was done half a century ago! The Convention has proved to be a very important tool in our work for human rights.

It is therefore with great respect that I will present the Norwegian policies, and answer the questions and the concerns of the Committee.

The convention covers a wide range of important issues for different ministries in the Norwegian Government.

I am the responsible minister for the legal framework of equal treatment on all discrimination grounds, family policies and integration policies.

My ministry has therefore a good overview of the challenges in an increasingly diversified society.

Our presentation today is an attempt to answer the topics in the "list of themes" we received in June. I will also use this opportunity to mention some of the latest measures taken by my Government in this field.

Members from key ministries will later on provide more detailed information on specific topics.

Mr. Chair

First of all, let me use this opportunity to mention that the Norwegian Government recently has taken steps to investigate, and to acknowledge, the historic hardships of some of the Norwegian national minorities.

On the International Roma Day 2015, the Prime Minister apologized for the treatment and policies of the Norwegian Government before - during - and after the Second World War.

And, for the fatal consequences that these policies had for the Norwegian Roma during the Holocaust.

Our Prime Minister has emphasized that it is high time that we confront this dark chapter of Norwegian history. My Government has promised to make collective reparation to the Roma.

Mr. Chair

I would like to highlight two major initiatives.

Firstly,

The Constitution of Norway dates back to 1814. As part of the 200-year celebration last year, the Constitution was updated in order to strengthen the protection of Human Rights.

The Constitution now includes a comprehensive human rights catalogue.

Article 98 of the Constitution comprises a general prohibition of all forms of discrimination.

It states that "All people are equal before the law", and that "no human being must be subject to unfair or unproportional differential treatment".

Secondly,

In April this year, the Parliament adopted a new Act on the National Institution for Human Rights, creating a new independent institution organized directly under the Parliament.

The Norwegian Parliament has underlined, that the protection of Sami and minority rights should be an important part of the institution's work.

The institution is given a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights in Norway. It is intended to fulfil the criteria for A-status in the Paris Principles.

Mr. Chair

Moving over to another important topic where our Government fully shares the concerns of the Committee, the Ombud and civil society;

- hate crime and hate speech.

As other countries, Norway also experiences hate crimes and hate speech.

Last year, a total of 223 cases of hate crime were reported to the police. In these cases, crimes due to racism were the most dominating motive.

However, hidden figures are a central problem regarding any sort of crime. When it comes to hate crime in particular, there are obviously limitations to the registrations.

The police are making good efforts to improve the registration of hate crime.

We know that statistics will never be sufficient for analyzing hate crime in a country. We will always need information from civil society and from a free and independent media in order to gain an overview.

The Director General of the Norwegian Prosecuting Authority emphasized recently that violence based on religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and the colour of your skin, are to be given priority.

The police are constantly working to become better at identifying and investigating hate crime.

I would like to mention the commendable efforts made by Oslo police district. They are working hard to clarify legal and practical challenges concerning hate crime.

They have established a dedicated group investigating hate crime.

A safety program provides counselling to victims of hate crime, in order to restore the victim's feeling of safety and the return to a normal everyday life.

The group provides training and cooperates with civil society and relevant organizations.

Mr. Chair

Freedom of opinion and expression is a fundamental right granted in the Norwegian Constitution. A living democracy must find room for different opinions.

At the same time, people should be able to express themselves publicly without being subjected to hate speech or threats.

My Government is concerned that some people hesitate to take part in public debate for fear of being subjected to hate speech.

The topic is given high priority, and we are working to find good ways to combat hate speech.

I will describe some of the measures taken so far:

- The Action Plan against radicalization and violent extremism includes a number of measures aimed at preventing hate speech.
- The Prime Minister herself is concerned about hate speech. Last summer she invited a number of women's organisations to discuss the problems facing women who participate in the public debate.
This was followed by a round table conference on the topic in November 2014. One of many conclusions from the round table conference was that we need more knowledge.
- We are pleased that the Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud took the initiative to work out a report on hate speech and hate crime.
The report contains a number of interesting suggestions, which we will consider along with other input.
- The campaign of the Council of Europe - No Hate Speech Movement – is being followed up in Norway. We supported the campaign last year, and also this year.
- I am also addressing this issue in a White Paper on gender equality, which will be sent the Parliament this fall.
- The police are developing new ways to go online and enter discussions with those who spread hate.
- We have also seen initiatives in the press, where instances of hate speech have been exposed.

Victims of hate speech have told of the effects on their feeling of safety, and people spreading hate speech have been confronted, - and their motives discussed.

In my opinion, these are positive and useful initiatives from the media.

Mr. Chair

Another concern is the reported levels of anti-Semitism that seems present in the Norwegian society.

A survey done by the Jewish Community in Norway stated that as many as 50 % had experienced anti-Semitism at school or at work.

In June this year, we started the work on a new Action Plan against anti-Semitism.

We held a round table conference with participants from the Jewish community, the Government, relevant Ministries, academics and NGOs.

One of the speakers at this conference was the young Muslim, Hassan Raja, who spoke about the initiative to form a "Ring of Peace" around Oslo's main synagogue.

More than 1300 people participated in the "Ring of Peace", which marked unity between Muslims and Jews in Norway.

It is important for the Government to support civil society initiatives like this one.

This year we have also allocated 3.5 million NOK to the Jewish Community to organize measures to increase knowledge in Norwegian society about Jews.

Mr. Chair

I will now like to move on to the question of integration policies.

The main goal for our integration policy is to ensure that everybody living in Norway is able to utilize his or her skills and resources, and to participate in, and contribute to, society.

All Ministries have an independent responsibility to make sure that immigrants have equal opportunities, rights and duties in their sector. My Ministry has the overall responsibility for coordinating the integration policy.

We also publish “Integration Goals” each year, as part of the national budget.

This is a statistical overview which makes visible the differences and similarities between immigrants as a group and the rest of the population in some important areas of society.

These statistics are used as a basis for different Ministries and public agencies to develop targeted policies and measures that give immigrants and their children equal opportunities, rights and duties.

A successful integration policy requires that refugees staying in Norway can settle down as soon as possible in a local community.

The settlement of refugees in Norway is based on agreements between the municipalities and the Government. This requires a close and constructive dialog with the municipalities all over Norway.

I put great emphasize on such a dialog, and have therefore done extensive traveling around all of Norway this last year, to meet and talk with local authorities about settling and integrating refugees in the communities.

Communities are taking on the responsibility for settlement. A successful settlement will also contribute to the community.

I am therefore glad to tell you that we see positive results. The number of settled persons in 2014 was the highest since 1994. It has increased by almost 20 % since 2013.

However, we acknowledge that we still have challenges.

Over 5000 refugees are still waiting for their new community where they will settle and integrate.

Mr. Chair

Integration is not only a question about settlement.

Participation in the labour market and good Norwegian language skills are keys to integration. Language skills are vital for understanding society and gaining employment.

Compared to many other countries, the overall labour market situation is good in Norway. The employment rates are relatively high and unemployment rates low. However,

the employment rates are lower and unemployment is higher among immigrants, and they vary among groups of immigrants.

My Government wants to ensure that more immigrants can find employment.

Introductory program and language instruction are important special schemes for immigrants.

Better Norwegian language tuition, a more effective introduction programme and more targeted labour market qualification programmes are critical success factors.

Today we experience differences between the municipalities in the results from the introduction program. Such as how many of their participants go further on to work or education.

We want the best municipalities to share their stories of success, in order for others to learn from best practise.

We will also establish faster procedures for approving qualifications from abroad, so that immigrants are able to make use of the qualifications they already have when they come to Norway.

There are still challenges to be met: Even when educated, and even born and raised in Norway, we get reports that people with another colour of their skin or a non-typical Norwegian name are being discriminated when they apply for jobs.

I have raised this issue within the Governments' co-operation with the social partners in the workforce.

Mr. Chair,

We are constantly working in all sectors to improve our services.

Good, reliable interpretation is vital for access to public services.

I am aware that both civil society and the Ombud have addressed this important issue. Last year I received a report from the Government appointed Interpreting Services Review Committee.

The Committee suggests a variety of actions. One of the proposals from committee is a separate Interpretation Act. We are now considering the follow-up of this report.

I would also like to touch upon the importance of a solid legal framework and enforcement of anti-discrimination.

We want to further develop the legal protection against discrimination, and are now working on a new, comprehensive Equality and Non-Discrimination Act. It will be sent on a public hearing this fall.

Protection against discrimination is a basic human right regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion and age.

One comprehensive act - covering all discrimination grounds - will make it easier for an individual to recognize when experiencing discrimination, and for those who want to avoid discriminating others.

My Ministry has also ordered an independent examination for the purpose of strengthening the enforcement of anti-discrimination law.

Mr. Chair

Last year our Government established an annual National Dialog Conference with minority organizations.

Our Prime Minister and several Ministers met with civil society.

The Government provides financial support to a variety of organizations and voluntary activities. This is a part of a living democracy.

Several organizations and institutions have also presented their own reports for the Committee.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank all of them for their contributions.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm our commitment to freedom of opinion and expression in Norwegian society, and in active participation in elections and opinion-forming.

A vibrant and well functioning democracy needs many different voices. Voices that are willing to listen in an open and tolerant mind.

I would now like to invite my delegation to provide you with more detailed information about our measures and work.

I will now give the floor to Director General Hege Nygård.

Thank you for your attention.