



**PERMANENT MISSION OF NORWAY**

**Statement by Mr Børge Brende**

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**Review of Norway**

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Mr President,

It is an honour for me to be here in connection with Norway's second Universal Periodic Review. Norway has strongly supported the UPR mechanism as an important pillar of the Human Rights Council. The UPR process provides us with a unique opportunity to reflect on our human rights achievements and challenges.

Norway is often featured as a state where human rights are well protected. This protection is the result of a number of factors, in particular a stable, democratic political system with strong and independent media, proximity to decision-makers, and a sound national economy. Furthermore, we have a robust institutional framework for promoting and protecting human rights, a high degree of gender equality, and broad participation in society through associations, political parties and non-governmental organisations.

Despite a good human rights record, the protection of human rights does not take care of itself, and one of our ambitions in this process is to learn from others so that we can protect human rights even more effectively.

While the UPR process addresses our human rights performance at the national level, I would like to **emphasise that the promotion of human rights is also an essential component of our foreign policy.** Human rights are hard-won rights. We cannot take them for granted. Human rights are under increasing pressure in a number of countries. We must continue to defend these rights by further developing strategic alliances across regions and together with civil society. The Government intends to present a white paper on our international efforts to promote and protect human rights later this year.

Mr President,

Our UPR report and the mid-term report that was submitted in 2012 describe **what we have done in response to the recommendations** made during the first review in 2009. **Several ministries have been involved** in this work and in the preparation of our second report. **Most of these ministries are represented in my delegation here today.**

In preparing the report, we have **consulted civil society**, both in open meetings and through the circulation of a draft report for comments. These comments were conveyed to the relevant ministries and considered carefully before the report was finalised. We see our engagement with civil society as mutually beneficial. It helps to ensure a better and more transparent process, and it has given us valuable input to the report. Civil society has also presented alternative reports, which we welcome, and consider to be an important part of the UPR process.

I would like thank the delegations that have sent questions in advance. I will address some of these in my opening statement, while others will be elaborated on in later statements.

I can assure you that my delegation will do its best to respond to any questions or recommendations that may be put to us.

Mr President,

Allow me at the outset to provide some general information about Norway. The Norwegian state is established on the territory of two peoples: the Norwegians, and the **Sami**, who are recognised as an indigenous people in Norway.

The development of Sami rights and institutions, and the formalisation of the dialogue between the public authorities and the Sami have been central elements in Norway's policy to strengthen Sami language, culture and society. Of particular importance are the establishment of the Samediggi – the Sami parliament – in 1989 and the formalised

procedures for consultations between the state authorities and the Sami parliament from 2005.

There are **five national minorities in Norway**: Kven, Jews, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani. Due to modern migration patterns, people with a family background from more than hundred countries now live in Norway. We regard the **diversity** this has brought to Norway as a **strength**, which has contributed to the prosperity our country enjoys today.

**Diversity also comes with its challenges**, particularly when the composition of society changes as rapidly as has been the case in Norway in recent decades. **No society is free from racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance.**

If a crime is committed against a person because of his or her religion, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability or similar, it is considered an aggravating circumstance by the courts. In 2013, Parliament amended the Penal Code to expand criminal offences directed at certain kinds of statements made in public, to include statements made on the Internet.

In order to strengthen and simplify **the legal framework on discrimination**, the Norwegian Government is currently **working on a new comprehensive equality and anti-discrimination act**. This single act will replace the various acts that currently prohibit discrimination.

**Successful integration** is crucial in societies that are characterised by diversity. The goal of Norway's integration policy is to ensure that immigrants are part of and have a sense of belonging to the Norwegian society.

**Participation in the labour market and good Norwegian language skills are keys to integration.** Language skills are vital for understanding society and gaining employment. This is why the Government intends to **strengthen language training for immigrants and assess children's language skills** before they start school. 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. Concerning Germany's advance question about the situation for immigrant women in the labour market; the registered unemployment rate among female immigrants in Norway is currently 6.8 percent. The Government wants to ensure that more immigrants find employment. We will strengthen and target language training and labour market qualification, aiming at increasing the employment rate among immigrant women in particular.

In response to the particular human rights challenge represented by **forced marriage and female genital mutilation**, the Government is continuing the efforts against these practices. In addition, new initiatives in the education sector are being introduced to strengthen preventive work in this field. NGOs and the public services are increasingly coordinating their work to ensure that they complement each other.

I would like to highlight **one particular measure** in our action plan. Four **Integration Counsellors have been appointed in relevant missions abroad** to provide assistance in cases involving Norwegian citizens visiting the country concerned. This has made it possible for many young people to return to Norway, and has prevented both forced marriages and female genital mutilation.

Mr President,

In relation to advance questions from the Netherlands and Portugal, I am pleased to announce that the Norwegian Government has decided to establish a **new independent national institution for human rights**: A motion to integrate the national institution with the Parliamentary Ombudsman is now being considered in Parliament.

This model ensures the institution's independence **in compliance with the Paris Principles**.

Mr President,

Norway has come a long way towards **gender equality**. With reference to the advance question from Germany, I can confirm that the action plan *Equality 2014* will be fully implemented by the end of this year.

The **employment rate among women** has risen significantly in recent decades and is now almost as high as that of men. Today 69 % of women are in the workforce. This is one of the highest in Europe. Moreover, more girls than boys complete higher education.

Not only are Norwegian women at the top of the European statistics for paid work; Norway also has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe.

Raising children is a joint responsibility for men and women. Parents in Norway are able to **combine active participation in the formal workforce with family life**. This is, for instance, due to a generous parental benefit scheme and day care available for all children.

Mr. President,

**Combating domestic violence** is a priority for this Government. Domestic violence is totally unacceptable, and perpetrators must expect to be prosecuted and punished. Over the years, we have removed various obstacles that made it difficult for victims to break out of their situation. Attitudes have changed in society as a whole. Despite significant improvements, the issue of violence against women is still high on the political agenda. We are making every effort to combat this social evil. Violence against women calls for a broad range of measures. Important measures are; prevention and early identification, help and protection for victims, prosecution and treatment of perpetrators, and competence-building within the police and welfare services.

Mr President,

It is vital for society that **the police carry out their duties in accordance with human rights standards**. We have managed to create a police force that is seldom accused of brutality. Suspects and victims alike are generally treated with respect and an open-minded approach. People who are under arrest are protected by strong legal safeguards. **Human rights are included in the curriculum for cadets** at the National Police University College. For example, they are taught that human rights are a set of ethical principles and values that serve as a corrective in the exercise of their daily work as police officers.

Mr President,

Let me go on to address the important **challenge of minor asylum seekers**.

In 2013, approximately 2 600 children seeking protection arrived in Norway, of whom 830 were unaccompanied minors. The Government attaches great importance to ensuring a rapid asylum process with due legal safeguards for these children as well as good living conditions during the said process. Steps have also been taken to shorten the processing time of applications from families with children.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the cornerstone of the Government's approach to immigration cases concerning children, and the best interests of the child is a primary consideration in all cases, as set out in the Immigration Act.

The guardianship system has been strengthened to ensure qualified and continuous follow-up of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.

Mr President,

All children in Norway are to be protected from neglect and abuse, and the welfare of children is a priority for the Government. The Norwegian Child Welfare Act applies to all children in Norway, regardless of their background. The primary duty of the Child



Welfare Service is to ensure that children living under harmful conditions receive the necessary assistance.

An increasing number of children require **assistance from the child welfare service**. In response to this need, the child welfare service has been significantly **strengthened in recent years**. New positions in the child welfare service at municipal level have been created and amendments to the Child Welfare Act have been adopted. The Government will continue to strengthen the child welfare service.

Mr President,

To conclude my opening remarks, I would like to reiterate that, despite important achievements in the field of human rights, this is not an area where we can allow ourselves to become complacent. We need to constantly scrutinise how the authorities are exercising their power and how our institutions are functioning. I can assure you that the Norwegian Government will continue to give high priority to promoting and protecting human rights, in Norway as well as internationally. We are looking forward to the discussions, and will do our best to answer questions and provide any additional information that you may request.

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