**UPR hearing of Norway – Opening statement**

President,

It is an honour for me to be here for Norway’s third Universal Periodic Review.

The UPR enables constructive dialogue between countries, national human rights institutions, other independent institutions and civil society on the implementation of human rights.

The UPR process gives countries a unique opportunity to reflect on our human rights achievements and challenges.

Norway strongly supports the UPR mechanism as a vital instrument of the Human Rights Council.

Sitting next to me are State Secretary Thor Sættem from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, State Secretary Frida Blomgren from the Ministry of Culture, and Ambassador Brattskar.

With us, we have a team consisting of colleagues from seven ministries.

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Fulfilling our human rights obligations is of great importance to Norway, and we cooperate closely with several international monitoring mechanisms.

Norway reports to the UN treaty bodies, and the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council have a standing invitation to Norway.

Norway has a stable, democratic political system - with a responsible government, independent judiciary and an accountable parliament.

We have strong and free media, a conducive environment for civil society, accessible decision-makers, a sustainable economy and an overall good human rights record.

However, making sure human rights are respected and implemented is a continuous task.

Upholding human rights is vital to the achievement of almost all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Norway will continue to take a strong and principled stand for human rights, in Norway and elsewhere, in close cooperation with civil society, member states from all regions, and the private sector.

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President,

The periodic review under the UPR process is an important opportunity to listen to, and learn from, others.

The recommendations we receive today will be carefully considered.

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In our second review in April 2014, Norway received 203 recommendations. Of these, we fully accepted 150, while partially accepting 23.

The relevant ministries have followed up these recommendations.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinated the preparation of our UPR report, which was submitted in February.

During the UPR reporting process, we consulted among others the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), held two open meetings, and invited the Sámediggi (Sami Parliament) and all interested stakeholders to provide information and input.

This process is in itself a valuable exercise in order to improve the enjoyment of human rights in Norway.

Our UPR report gives an account of the implementation of the recommendations Norway accepted after the previous review, and of other developments in the human rights field.

I will now highlight some key developments. Throughout our interventions, we will reply to the advance questions submitted.

The two state secretaries will support me in this task.

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President,

Norway has a strong legal framework for human rights protection. A new chapter on human rights was included in the Norwegian Constitution in 2014.

Several key human rights conventions are incorporated into Norwegian law through the Human Rights Act, and the Act prevails over other Norwegian law in the event of conflict.

The general principle is that Norwegian law must, as far as possible, be interpreted in accordance with Norway’s obligations under international law, particularly in the human rights field.

Norway is party to seven of the UN core human rights instruments, and has accepted four of the communications mechanisms.

Very soon, Norway will also ratify the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

The Norwegian parliament (Storting) consented to ratification last week, and the actual ratification will take place shortly.

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President,

I would like to thank the UK for its advance question on whether Norway plans to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Let me address this and a few similar issues.

The Government has given thorough consideration to whether or not Norway should become party to the communications mechanisms to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Three independent reviews have been commissioned, one for each mechanism, and all were subject to public consultations.

In a 2016 white paper, the Government decided that it would not propose that Norway should accept these mechanisms. This was due to considerable uncertainty about the consequences.

The main reason Norway has not accepted the communications mechanism to the CRPD is that in some areas, the Committee has a broad interpretation of the Convention that we believe is not in line with the prevailing interpretation among the state parties.

The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child contain certain rights in the economic and social domain that are not always well suited to international consideration of individual communications.

One example is the right to the enjoyment of “the highest attainable standard of health”.

I would like to add that in 2017, a broad majority in the parliament (Storting) supported the Government’s view.

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President,

As a follow up to the previous UPR cycle, the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution was established in 2015. It has a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights, and its annual budget has increased considerably since its establishment.

In 2017, it was accredited with “A-status” by the GANHRI (Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions), meaning it is in full compliance with the Paris Principles.

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President,

The Norwegian society has a high degree of gender equality.

For instance, the employment rate for women is nearly as high as that for men.

There is still work to be done:

Gender imbalance in education and in the labour market is particularly affecting women with minority backgrounds.

We need more female leaders in the business sector.

The #Metoo campaign has shown all of us that sexual harassment is far too widespread.

And, we must work against domestic violence, abuse and negative social control.

The Government is working to draw up a strategy for achieving a more gender-balanced education system and labour market.

The Government has also proposed a bill to the Storting (the Norwegian Parliament) about establishing a low-threshold system for reporting sexual harassment.

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The Government works actively to ensure that every Norwegian has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.

The principle of non-discrimination is now part of the Constitution.

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, which entered into force in January 2018, prohibits discrimination and obliges public authorities, employers, and employer and employee organisations to work actively to promote equality and prevent discrimination.

Norway’s anti-discrimination enforcement regime has also been strengthened.

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President,

Norway recently made amendments to the Child Welfare Act.

The Child Welfare Act applies to all children in Norway, regardless of their residence status, nationality or citizenship.

Our system is child-centric, with a protective and supportive approach to children at risk.

The vast majority of measures – in fact approximately 81% - are voluntary measures in the home.

The threshold for placing a child in alternative care is defined by law.

A child may only be placed in care if he or she suffers neglect, violence or abuse, and if voluntary measures in the home are inadequate. Placing a child in care without the consent of the parents is always a measure of last resort and must be in the best interest of the child.

Further, only the County Social Welfare Boards are entitled to issue care orders. They are impartial and independent state bodies with the same procedural rules as the courts.

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I would also like to underline that there is zero tolerance for corporal punishment in Norway.

The legal safeguards for children, and for parents, were strengthened in 2018.

The legislation stresses that the child is the most important person in child welfare cases, and has individual rights, including the right to seek help from the child welfare service. Children have an independent right to be heard in matters affecting them.

In line with views expressed by children themselves, the importance of treating children with love, care and understanding has been included in the Act.

Child welfare cases are highly delicate situations. The act requires that the child welfare services follow up the children and parents in a respectful and cooperative way.

Furthermore, the temporary nature of a care order has been specified in the Act. It also includes requirements to follow up parents with a view to reunite them with the child.

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Even though the legal framework is good, there is always room for improvement. This includes practical implementation and how to relate to different attitudes, cultures and practices. Competence-building in the child welfare services is therefore of great importance.

I would also like to mention that the Norwegian Government has appointed a special committee to review the Children Act and to consider amendments.

A new Children Act must continue to safeguard the human rights of the child, and Norway’s obligations under international conventions, in particular the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the European Convention on Human Rights (HRC).

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President,

In recent years, the Government has strengthened efforts to prevent domestic violence.

We have ratified the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. We are currently working to implement our obligations.

This includes efforts to address domestic violence and abuse in certain Sami communities. We are working in cooperation with the Sámediggi(Sami parliament), local authorities, civil society and other relevant actors.

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We are working continuously to safeguard the interest and rights of LGBTIQ people in Norway.

The Government will review the protection against discrimination, and consider whether protection against discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression should be included should be included in the Penal Code, as it already is in the equality- and anti-discrimination act.

State Secretary Blomgren will elaborate further in her intervention.

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President,

A number of schemes are in place in Norway, aiming to help people with disabilities and their families live independent and active lives.

In December 2018, the Government presented a strategic plan for 2020–2030 to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities in order to ensure a more coordinated and integrated approach.

The Storting has asked the Government to present a white paper on the rights of people with intellectual disabilities.

The Government’s Action Plan for Universal Design 2015-2019 makes universal design a requirement for all new buildings, means of transport, infrastructure, websites and self-service terminals.

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President,

Allow me to say a few words about our efforts to minimize the use involuntary measures in our health and care services. It is a public responsibility to promote health, prevent illness and ensure the necessary health and care services for the entire population. Increasing and improving patient empowerment is a central part of Norway’s health and care policy. In recent years, great efforts have been made to minimize involuntary measures against patients and users. Despite of this, we face challenges. A new legislation Commission will review the entire legislation regarding all forms of coercive measures in the field of health and care services, and will submit a report this June with proposals for further amendments to the existing legal framework. Among other things, the Commission is exploring the introduction of additional safeguards regarding involuntary treatment and care.

President,

Hate speech is a threat to democratic debate.

We are working to ensure that everyone can participate in the public debate regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation - without being threatened or harassed.

Racism and anti-Semitism exist in Norway, like in other countries, and the Government is working actively to combat it.

The Government’s Action plan against anti-Semitism (2016–2020) was presented in 2016, and sets out a number of measures aimed at reducing anti-Semitism in Norway. A survey from 2017 shows that the proportion of the Norwegian population with marked prejudices against Jews decreased from 12% in 2011 to 8% in 2017.

Furthermore, the Government is drawing up a new action plan against racism and discrimination based on ethnicity and religion, and will implement measures to counter discrimination in several sectors.

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President,

In a democratic society based on the rule of law, the police and other authorities must carry out their duties in accordance with human rights standards.

This also applies to investigative techniques. I am pleased to be able to say that the Norwegian police have moved away from confession-based interrogation, and now use investigative interviewing.

The move to investigative interviewing has required a change of attitudes within the police, towards an open interviewing approach that facilitates accurate and reliable information.

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture has held up Norway’s use of investigative interviewing as an example of good practice.

Investigative interviewing will be an important tool in the efforts to meet Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions).

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President,

We all look forward to engaging with you on these issues, in today’s review and in the ensuing process under the Universal Periodic Review.

I now ask State Secretary Sættem to take the floor, followed by State Secretary Blomgren.

Thank you.