

## **NORWEGIAN STATEMENT**

**Durban Review Conference, Geneva 20 April 2009**

**Remarks/address by Jonas Gahr Støre, Minister of Foreign Affairs**

**Check against delivery.**

**Mr. President,**

**This is the rostrum of the United Nations. By definition it is a rostrum for the freedom of speech – crucial among human rights.**

**The President of Iran has just exercised that human right. He did so – I believe – in a way that threatens the very focus of this conference.**

**Today we meet on the basis of a declaration that has been carefully negotiated by our representatives. It has managed to build a broad consensus, bringing on board all states and groups of states.**

**By his intervention the President of Iran chose to place his country outside the margins of this declaration.**

**Freedom of speech – yes. But the document that we have agreed is also clear on the need to protect against the incitement of hatred. I heard the messages in the President’s speech – and they amount to just that: Incitement of hatred, spreading politics of fear and promoting an indiscriminate message of intolerance.**

**The declaration that we have agreed is not a finger pointing exercise, it is not listing one conflict after another. Today’s declaration is principled. We know there are many conflicts – too many conflicts – around the world between countries and within countries. The text aims at protecting people and individuals against the scourge of racism, discrimination and incitement to hatred.**

**The Iranian President’s allegations run counter to the very spirit and dignity of this conference. I will not respond to all the allegations. Through his message the president has made Iran the odd man out. And Norway will not accept that the odd man out hijacks the collective effort of the many.**

**Again – the President of Iran chose to place Iran as the odd man out.**

**Mr President,**

**The point of departure that has brought us to Geneva is our common obligation to fight racism.**

**This obligation is pressing. Because racism degrades us as human beings. Racial discrimination is a denial of human rights.**

**With this as our point of departure, it should be easy to agree on a final outcome document from this conference. We know, however, that agreeing on this has been anything but easy. We learned this lesson in Durban eight years ago.**

**The debates and various manifestations at the NGO forum in 2001 descended into a clamour of conflicting messages and extreme statements. In some circles Durban was remembered more by the outrageousness of some of the statements than by the content of the document that was adopted at the conference.**

**Let us not forget that the Durban declaration was accepted by near consensus. In my country it served as a point of reference for the elaboration of detailed action plans to combat racism and discrimination.**

**The run-up to this review conference has not been easy either. A few months ago we had before us a text marred by brackets and conflicting statements – detracting from the vital message we are seeking to convey: namely that racism in all its forms must be fought.**

**Norway for its part defined five key objectives as we embarked on the final stretch of the preparations:**

**First, we wanted a strong and unequivocal text against racism. We could not accept the text being taken hostage by a whole array of unrelated issues.**

**Second, we could not accept a text that called for restrictions on the defamation of religions. Human rights obligations protect individuals, not religions. It is within the scope of freedom of expression to criticise both gods and religions.**

**Third, we could not accept a text that would infringe on freedom of expression as defined in Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Without freedom of expression, we cannot fight racism or human rights violations. In short; we cannot compromise on the hard-won gains made in the field of universal human rights.**