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Human Rights Council
13th session

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Date: 15 March 2010

Your ref.:

Our ref.:

Oral Statement at the 13th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (Item 6: Consideration of UPR reports) - Consideration of Norway's Universal Periodic Review

Mr President,

On behalf of the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR), Norway's National Human Rights Institution, I am pleased to address the Human Rights Council.

The NCHR commends the Norwegian Government for its inclusive, self-critical and constructive approach where the involvement of various ministries has emphasized human rights as a matter of national importance.

We welcome the adoption by the Norwegian Government of the vast majority of the draft UPR recommendations. The NCHR will closely monitor their implementation.

On the critical side we would like to highlight two concerns which we emphasized in the preparatory process but are wanting in the draft UPR report:

1. The Government has not responded to demands for a new National plan of action for human rights. Consequently, policy is unclear: no specific goals have been set; no overall measures are initiated, there is no coordination of ministry initiatives, no plan for competence-building in the state bureaucracy and no overall mechanism for political follow-up of decisions taken. In sum, the lack of a Plan of Action weakens the Government's accountability when it comes to its human rights commitments.

The Norwegian authorities' fragmented approach to the use of religious garments, primarily hijab, exemplifies the challenges of policy coordination. Up until now this issue has been addressed on a case-by-case basis. The role of religion and the use of religious garments more generally in Norwegian society have not yet been addressed by the Government on a principled basis.

The NCHR therefore recommends that Norway commit to formulate and implement a Plan of Action for Human Rights and establish a high level inter-ministerial coordinating mechanism for its follow-up in consultation with the NCHR and civil society.

2. Lastly, Norway has taken pride in being at the forefront of human rights protection through ratifications of international legal instruments. However, Norway has not yet ratified the Optional Protocols to the Convention Against Torture (CAT), to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and to the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD).

The NCHR therefore recommends that the Norwegian authorities continue to set a good example internationally by giving priority to ongoing ratification processes.

Thank you for your attention.