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Att: Lars Vasbotten, Deputy Director General
Ragnhild Skåld, Senior Adviser

Re: With reference to the Ministry of Education's letter dated June 6th, 2011 (Your ref: 201102794-RS)

Comments to draft of the North American Strategy for Higher Education Cooperation 2012-2015 of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research:

The main priorities in the draft Strategy seem to be appropriate, important and necessary to achieve the desired outcome especially when applied to the geographic area of the Midwest in the USA. However, there is a need for more focus on relevant, detailed reporting and demand for results as well as firmer support from the Ministry based on openness to ideas that promote Norway in new business, government, education and research collaborations .

1. Collaboration at government level and arenas:

In addition to the formal networks outlined in the Strategy, efforts should be made to support and evaluated regionally generated forums that promote Norway. In the Midwest, *the Nobel Peace Prize Forum* is one such arena. The Nobel Peace Prize Forum in Minneapolis is an awareness raising and high-profiled arena that supplies North American students with information about Norway and generates interest in Norwegian matters. A Norwegian presence at the annual forum conference could help to promote graduate studies for US students in Norway related to peace, hence strengthening network arenas and student mobility, which are desired goals of the Strategy for the Norwegian Ministry of Education. One of Norway's greatest exports is its peacemaking, and the most recognizable and prestigious symbol of peacemaking is the Nobel Peace Prize, Norway's greatest "Brand Name". The Nobel Peace Prize Forum exists to inspire peacemaking by celebrating the work of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates. In 2011 attendance at the Forum exceeded 1200, and 45% of attendees said that it significantly changed their lives or their thinking. Each summer US undergraduate "peace scholars" complete a peace studies course at the University of Oslo.

Because of its new permanent location in Minneapolis, Minnesota (where 30% of the population boasts Norwegian heritage) and its structure (now involving six US universities with a combined enrollment of 75,000 students), the Forum has a unique, unparalleled ability to vastly exceed its past performance. The Forum is conducting research that measures the outcomes of the Forum, including US/Norwegian student exchanges, research collaboration, and business engagement.

Mayo Clinic Innovation Scholars program

The Mayo Innovation Scholars Program is a collaborative initiative supported by the Medtronic Foundation, the Mayo Clinic and the Minnesota Private College Council. MISPP offers an opportunity for selected graduate students and undergraduate science and business students to work on research projects submitted by Mayo Clinic professionals through the Mayo Clinic Office of Intellectual Property. MISPP continues to be an innovative model for student experiential learning. These past two years MISPP has together with me as Director of Higher Education and Research, evaluated the concept of an international component to their program and have held discussions with 4 of Norway's major universities. A pilot project has now been initiated together with "Master of Science in Innovation and Entrepreneurship" program at the University of Oslo's and with St Olaf College.

2. Institutional partnerships and stronger correlation between higher education and research collaboration.

The Strategy highlights some prioritized fields of research cooperation including energy, health, ICT, polar research and climate and natural resources. As an example within "Health and ICT" of a way to efficiently promote the aforementioned objective on collaboration, I would like to point to high profile initiatives such as USA's "One Mind for Research" where Norway has the opportunity to be the first nation outside of the USA to participate. This International research initiative which is being kicked off at the University of Minnesota later this fall, involves significant involvement from higher education institutions across the USA together with Norwegian research universities and it includes a focus on research involving the Norwegian Biobanks and Registries. Norwegian business networks such as Oslo Medtech, Nansen Neuroscience Network and Innovation Norway, as well as US counterparts such as US Life Science Alley and BioBusiness Alliance are all being invited to play a role in this major research collaboration. The Norwegian Research Council and the Ministry of Education, and Fulbright Foundation can also play a role in this initiative that is supported by the USA's central administration. Moreover, Norwegian students have already been placed in concrete projects and research labs involving industry and the University of Minnesota. The first Norwegian/American "One Mind for Research" Conference regarding

Neuroscience and Psychiatry, will be held on November 3rd and 4th 2011 at the University of Minnesota.

It is a broad collaborative effort that includes government, academia and business/industry such as former Congressman Patrick Kennedy, Provost of Harvard, Dr Steven Hyman, Garen & Shari Staglin (Staglin Family Vineyards) as well as others in the One Mind for Research Campaign, and influential representatives from the scientific community in Norway and the University of Minnesota. All are advocates for increasing the efforts made in understanding a broad range of challenges connected to the brain. The list of speakers will include among others, leading US and Norwegian neuroscientists and advocates, as well as Congressman Patrick Kennedy, Congressman Keith Ellison, former Prime Minister of Norway, Kjell Magne Bondevik and former Vice President Walter Mondale. It expands on a successful conference that was held last fall at the University of Oslo's Center for Molecular Biology and Neuroscience (CMBN) together with Prime Minister Bondevik, Professor Hossein Fatemi (U of M) and Professor Jim Fallon from U of California at Irvine together with UiO Center for Molecular and Neuroscience (CMBN) at Rikshospitalet.

In light of the recent tragedy in Norway, there will be an increasing focus on the importance of obtaining a better understanding of brain disorders and of the need to identify, cure and treat them. We also need to learn how to take better preventive actions.

The upcoming Minnesota conference will also call on broad Norwegian participation and thus introduce an international aspect to the One Mind initiative. This particular collaboration makes a lot of sense in Minnesota, the heartland of "Norwegian" America. Also, we would like to investigate the idea of establishing US/Norwegian International Centers of Excellence in Neuroscience and Psychiatry, a concept that is known from other disciplines. We believe such centers of Excellence would lead to significant research gains in particular as it would give access to Norway's truly unique and high quality biobanks. It is a concrete outcome of the research agreement signed by Executive Director for the NIH Francis Collins and the Executive Director of the Norwegian Research Council Arvid Hallen. Fred Kavli from the Kavli Foundation has also been invited as have the central people at the Kavli Institute at NTNU in Trondheim and HUNT.

Our goals for this conference are simple, but bold. In the collaborative spirit of, and in cooperation with, the One Mind for Research Campaign, we want to promote international brain research especially between Norway and the USA in order to understand and find cures for all brain disorders. The Obama administration has officially announced their support for One Mind in a keynote speech by Vice President Joe Biden on May 25th, 2011. The human brain has been called the last frontier of medical science. The time is now for collaborative, concerted efforts to create the greatest breakthroughs in the history of neurological exploration.

3. Mobility of students and staff

There are several new projects in process with regards to mobility of students and staff between the Midwest Norway including institutions such as the University of Akershus University College / Oslo University College, the University of North Dakota (Office for Research and Economic Development), The State of Missouri Education Board, the Institute for Industrial and Applied Life Sciences at Missouri Western State University, University of Tromsø, NTNU, MEDICA, St Thomas University, St. Olaf College, University of Minnesota, Augsburg College, Macalester College, Concordia College, and Luther College.

In short, only a few of the activities related to education and research here in the Midwest have been highlighted in [this](#) report.

4 General

It is a particular concern related to ongoing processes that my position as Director for Higher Education and Research is being terminated September 30th 2011.

Building networks for international collaborations are demanding and often slow processes that are also based on building personal relationships and networks. It is therefore concerning that ongoing initiatives may be hampered when my position is being discontinued. I will mention one case in particular.

From the position at the Consulate, I have taken the initiative to and been instrumental in bringing forward plans for the mentioned neuroscience and mental health conference in Minneapolis and for a unique prospective collaboration related to One Mind for Research where Norway is in a position to become the first international research partner in a US nationwide initiative. Such multidisciplinary research collaboration would promote transatlantic research and student/faculty mobility between Norway and North America particularly at graduate levels.

Terminating the support for more collaboration within education and research in the Midwest is sending a strong and confusing signal to the region where millions are calling themselves “Norwegians”.