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Prime Minister of Norway

Statement to the Summit of the Council of Europe,
Vienna, 8 October 1993.

Mr. Chairman,
Secretary General,

It is a source of concern for any organization to be taken for granted. If an organization is seen as a custodian of past achievements rather than as an engine of change, it risks being met with indifference and lack of compassion.

We should admit that there have been times in the recent past when the core functions of the Council of Europe did not attract great political attention. This has changed.

There were times when many believed that threats to democracy and human rights had become a residual problem in the countries of concern to the Council of Europe. This has changed too.

New tragedies are unfolding in Europe. In parts of former Yugoslavia and in several of the Caucasian republics we are witnessing brutal warfare and untold human suffering at our own doorstep. There seems to be no limit to the brutality that human beings are capable of mobilizing in the service of a nationalistic goal, committed in the name of doctrine, - the doctrine of the ethnic state, - and as such prolong the sinister path of doctrine as a source of war and contention in this century.

The violence in Moscow was instigated by a National Assembly without legitimacy. The whole of the Russian people are the victims of this tragedy. More than anything they need to build representative democracy, accelerate economic reform, and pursue social reconstruction and healing.

In Western European countries, more than 20 million people are out of work. We cannot afford, nor allow our people to go idle. Unless we struggle relentlessly against unemployment, and lack of security and opportunity we risk creating new victims to the seductive voice of populist, undemocratic, irresponsible demagoguery. What can ensue is more racism, more extreme nationalism, xenophobia and intolerance which we see in too many countries in Europe today, including my own.

It is therefore timely that we gather here in Vienna to pledge our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Council of Europe and to decide how we could best use the organization, its potential, its competence and its structures, to meet these new challenges.

The Vienna declaration must emphasize the vital role the Council of Europe can play in promoting democratic security throughout the whole of Europe. The development and

consolidation of democracy, human rights and the rule of law constitutes an essential foundation for the further development of European cooperation. It will link our countries together in a common vision of the fundamental objectives of a humane society.

The new democracies in Europe have turned to the Council of Europe in their process of fully integrating into European cooperation. This underlines the importance they attach to the development of democracy and the rule of law as a basis for the further political, social and economic development of their societies. We must give priority to meeting the needs of the new and potential members. To ensure a successful integration we must continue to provide assistance within the key areas of competence of the Council of Europe. In this way, we will confirm the importance of the Council in today's and tomorrow's Europe.

In the preparations for this Summit, Norway has proposed the elaboration of a plan of action to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism and intolerance. We appreciate that agreement has been reached on this.

The fight against racism must be fought in many different arenas. The Council of Europe, founded on legally binding instruments in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, is particularly well suited as a forum for joint efforts in this fight. We appreciate that agreement has been reached on the main elements of the action plan. Its adoption will be an expression of our will to take concrete, cooperative action in this field of great and common concern.

A main feature will be the mobilization of the strength, support and imagination of the young people of Europe in the fight against racism and in favor of a tolerant society based on the equal dignity of all its members. The European youth organizations have already made clear that they are ready to engage in the European Youth Campaign which we now will launch. It is essential that we and our governments are willing to do our part and to follow up the commitments we undertake here today, not least by making available the necessary financial resources for the Campaign through additional, voluntary contributions.

Another tangible element in the plan of action will be the establishment of a new and permanent expert committee, with a mandate to include the review of legislation and policies in member states, and the formulation of policy recommendations. It will allow us to learn from each other's success stories as well as from our failures, and underlines the longterm perspective of our commitment.

Indeed such policy review and country examination should be made an integral part of our work in the Council of Europe, as also stated just now by Prime Minister Lubbers.

Together with the younger generation, we must all build a coalition for tolerance and dignity. Let us forge a community of purpose so that the world can look to the whole of Europe as a beacon of hope, a source of leadership and a model for other countries and regions where today the roots of democracy are growing on the thinnest soil. Let us use the Council of Europe to pursue the democratic ideals to which this continent gave birth.