

Statement by Mr. Odvar Nordli, Prime Minister
of Norway, Sons of Norway, Minneapolis,
June, 16, 1979.

First let me express my gratitude for the kind invitation of the Sons of Norway to this fine reception.

Both my wife and I, and ^{the} members of my delegation, have looked forward to this evening. And we already feel that we are among friends here in the heart of America.

We in Norway fully recognize the importance to us of the existence in the United States of such a large group of people with distant or near roots in our own country. It means that the very close relations which have been developed between the two countries in the fields of political, economic and cultural relations are

- 2 -

resting on a solid foundation of personal ties of family and friendship. In sheer numbers the group of Americans of Norwegian origin may not be of an impressive size. But if you look at the situation from our side of the Atlantic you will realize that we have in Norway very few families without remote or close relatives in the United States.

That this fact is of essential significance in time of crisis as in time of peace was demonstrated during the Second World War, when Americans of Norwegian origin did so much to help their old country survive the Nazi occupation. It is, against this background, as a sound national policy for Norway to seek to maintain the closest

possible links with Americans of Norwegian descent, with their organizations, churches, newspapers, educational institutions, and other activities.

It is to our advantage that Norwegian-Americans seem to be well organized. The largest of all Norwegian organizations in America - if I may be permitted to put it like that - is the Sons of Norway with more than 100.000 members in all parts of the United States. The Sons of Norway not only look well after the interests of their members; the organization is also working consistently to promote the exchange of people, ideas and cultural manifestations between our two countries.

To me it has been particularly gratifying that the Sons of Norway during the last few years has made such fine efforts to bring to the United States the experiences we have made in Norway and the social attitudes we have developed in trying to help handicapped persons to enjoy a fuller and more meaningful life. The plans for establishing a health sports center based on the Norwegian Beitostølen model here in Minnesota now seem to be fairly well advanced. At the Bi-Centennial of the United States in 1976 the Norwegian people through the Storting gave 200.000 dollars to be used for a contribution of lasting value to the Vinland Center. In my mind, a health sports center bearing such a proud name is bound to be a successful venture.

It is most encouraging that the cooperation between the Norwegians on both sides of the Atlantic has entered into a field like this. We have much to celebrate and to cultivate in our common heritage, but I think it is even more important that we apply the lessons of our joint heritage in efforts to solve the many problems of our own time and age and maybe in particular in the endeavours to ensure a life in dignity for all our citizens.

In this respect I also find it most encouraging that the study of Norwegian subjects is such a going concern at schools, colleges and universities in the United States, and that American Studies are well-established in Norway's educational institutions. It is a good promise for the future that

our young people as part of their education are seeking more knowledge about and a better understanding of the other country, its history, culture and present situation. From the Norwegian side we have within the limits of our resources sought to stimulate and support Norwegian studies in the United States, and it is my sincere hope that we may in the years to come be able to devote more efforts to this end.

In the preservation of Norwegian scholarship in the United States a most vital role has been played by the Norwegian-American Historical Association based at the St. Olaf College. Through the high standards of its scholarship and publications the Association has done much

to make us understand the forces behind the large-scale emigration from Norway in the 19th century and the conditions surrounding the settlement of Norwegian immigrants in the United States. And what you read in the publications of the Historical Association you may observe with your own eyes at the Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, Iowa. I would on this occasion, on behalf of the Government of Norway, like to extend to the two institutions - the Norwegian-American Historical Association and the Vesterheim Museum - our heartfelt thanks for the fine work you have done in the past, and also to wish you every success in the future.