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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen

There are a few misconceptions about Norway, so let me correct two of them. First; I'm afraid we are not born with skis on our feet. The second I'll get back to!

But a couple of other things are true:

The Norwegian welfare system is aimed at promoting the greatest possible workforce participation by women – and men. To achieve this, all Norwegians now have a statutory right to **daycare facilities** for their children and to **one year's paid parental leave**.

Subsidized daycare centres is a vital key factor. Today we have full coverage for children aged 1-5 in daycare-centres of high quality and at a fixed low price.

The paid parental leave can be used by both parents. Today 12 weeks are reserved for the father. Thanks to this quota fathers are increasingly "coming home". But we aim to go beyond this. Our current goal is to promote 'equal families'. The government has recently submitted a White Paper to the Parliament. It focuses on the importance of strengthening women's position in the labour market through a more efficient family policy. In particular fathers must assume more responsibility at home. We want mothers to make an earlier return to work, and fathers to be more involved in child care. This is good for everyone; mother, father and child. It has also wider social benefits

and contributes to a more even distribution of income between women and men.

These welfare schemes; daycare coverage and a generous parental leave, enable Norwegian parents to combine work with child care.

We have managed to reach a high level of workforce participation through decades of strong emphasis on our welfare society, one of Norway's most important political outputs. This is not only a question of having sufficient financial resources available. We became prosperous **because** we developed the welfare society. This has been accomplished through decades of a tripartite cooperation between employers, employees, and the authorities.

And a steady focus on women's rights: Norwegian politics since the fifties have been to pave the way for women and girls in education, in the labour market and to be eligible to high positions in the economy and decision-making processes. The welfare society was crucial for women's liberation and gender equality for two reasons: First, the welfare sector-jobs provided a lot of opportunities for women from the 1960's and further on. They moved women from the informal economy in home-making, agriculture etc, to the formal economy. Secondly, public services made it possible for most women to combine labour market participation with family responsibilities.

In achieving our welfare society, the strong **tripartite cooperation** between employers, employees, and the authorities has been crucial. The Norwegian social security and welfare policies are based on this system. We have a long and successful tradition of cooperation between the unions, employers and

the Government. The welfare society can only be achieved if governments, in collaboration with the employers and employees organisations agree upon designing and enabling structures and reforms.

The added advantage in the case of tripartism is that it can engender solidarity among the social actors. One arena in which consultation and dialogue have played prominent roles in recent years, is the reform of welfare policies and institutions. Social pacts are the most appropriate form of cooperation, because they enable actors to concert their strategies across policy fields. These pacts can deliver higher employment, more wage moderation, and higher welfare obligations than are otherwise possible to attain. Thus the social dialogue is a contribution to macroeconomic performance and social stability, particularly in the reform and reorganisation of labour market policies and institutions are vital.

Tripartite cooperation plays thus an important role in promoting universal and comprehensive social security systems. Through tripartite cooperation, representatives of employers, employees and the Government can work in collaboration and through consultation and discussion. This process often results in universal regulations and legislations, covering all, for instance new pension system.

The social policy, labour market policy and economic policy are interrelated. The social and welfare protection has an *investment side* and a *cost side* of the economic development. The investment approach dominates when discussing the integration of women in the labour market.

Now finally, the second misperception about Norway:

Our wealth is not dependent just on oil. In fact, our greatest asset is our labour force. Norway's prosperity is based on people's minds and hands. In 2009, our employment rate was almost seven percentage points higher than the average of EU-19. The high workforce participation is a result of the tripartite cooperation, which has given gender equality. Gender equality is a prerequisite and key factor for economic growth! We have strong indications showing that gender equality gives economic growth:

Women's employment boosts the GDP. Both EU and UN facts and figures state it clearly: Countries which suppress - or doesn't include girls and women - are lagging behind. These countries are slowing down their development. They will continue to do so until they unleash and support the talent and potential of girls and women – and back such policy change with adequate funding. The cost of gender inequality for national economies is not only indecent and wrongful towards the girls and women of the world. It is simply not smart economics! Gender equality is.

Thank you for the attention!