

Norway national day

Shared values to cherish and cooperation to strengthen

Arne Walther
AMBASSADOR OF NORWAY

Today, Norwegians are in a particularly festive mood. May 17 is Norway's National Day and we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of our Constitution of 1814. It is the oldest constitution in Europe and the second



oldest in the world still in use. We celebrate our Constitution and independence not with military parades, but with parading children center stage waving flags enthusiastically in what is a happy and unique celebration of peace and optimism for the future.

Key democratic values

Norway's constitution was one of the most liberal in the world at the time. It embodied the principles of separation of

powers, safeguarding of civil rights and sovereignty of the people. Enshrined was the idea that "All people are born free and equal: they have certain natural, essential and inalienable rights. These are liberty, security and property."

Not only did the Constitution lay the foundation for development of our democracy, it was also instrumental in providing Norway with the status of an independent country. Key values embodied in it remain the backbone of our democracy; empowering the people and preventing misuse of power. Individual rights and freedom of expression are cornerstones of modern democracy in Norway, as in Japan. Together we promote these values on the global scene in the United Nations and other international endeavors.

Looking around the world



Norway is known for its many fjords. INNOVATION NORWAY

today, we know that such values should not be taken for granted.

The bicentenary is a unique opportunity to reflect on challenges that our democracy will face in the years ahead and that will require participation and dedication by young and old alike. We are mindful of our responsibilities to coming generations. We are also mindful

of the responsibilities that we share with other nations to ensure a peaceful, equitable and sustainable common future in a globalizing world.

Focus on children

This year our Embassy celebration in Minami-Azabu has a very special focus on children and the future. Norway's Ombudsman for Children, Ms.

Anne Lindboe, is our special guest from Norway. The Ombudsman is appointed by the government, but works independently of the government, to safeguard and promote the interests of children.

During her stay in Japan, she will meet with Japanese authorities and institutions concerned with the welfare of children. She will also visit Ashinaga's "Rainbow House" in Sendai and meet children who lost their mothers and fathers in the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan three years ago. We are happy to be associated with the efforts of Rainbow House though our continuing "Team Norway" support to recovery in Tohoku.

Woman at the helm

Norway's Constitution was written exclusively by men 200 years ago. Today, we again have a female prime minister governing our country following national elections last September. A coalition government of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party headed by Ms. Erna Solberg carries forward the imperative of men and women being equally represented as ministers in the Cabinet. Gender equality in politics, business and other sectors of societal activity and not least at home and in family affairs has become a core value and cornerstone of democracy in Norway.

Norway and Japan cooperate closely for global peace and sustainable economic and social development. Our new government is putting even stronger focus on commercial cooperation with partners abroad. Our interest in further



Norway National Day focuses on children. INNOVATION NORWAY

developing political and economic cooperation with Japan is underscored by four political level visits to Japan in the first half of the year with more to come after summer, including our parliament's Standing Committee on Transportation. We are also looking forward to the Norway-Japan Marine Science Week in June. It follows on the first Norway-Japan Science Week that we held last year commemorating the 10th Anniversary of our bilateral agreement on cooperation in science and technology.

Support to Tohoku

Earlier this month, Reconstruction Minister Takumi Nemoto visited Norway. He outlined Japan's recovery efforts after the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami to our Minister of Fisheries Ms. Elisa-

beth Aspaker and gave a well-attended public lecture at the University of Oslo. Nemoto expressed his appreciation of our "Team Norway" support to recovery in Tohoku and was briefed on Norway's fisheries policies and experiences by Aspaker. He visited a coastal fisheries community to study Norwegian policies and conditions first hand.

Our "Team Norway" support to recovery in Tohoku also focuses on renewable solar and floating offshore wind energy, environmental technology, seafood safety and the empowerment of women in disaster preparedness and reconstruction efforts. These are important areas where cooperation between our two countries already is substantial and where much potential remains to be unleashed.

Congratulations

on

the Norwegian Constitution Day

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A Bluestar Company

Elkem Japan K.K.

Bosch Building Akasaka 8F,
2-13-1, Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0014
Tel: 03-3596-1051 Fax: 03-3596-1052
<http://www.elkem.co.jp>

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HÖEGH AUTOLINERS

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Daido Kasumigaseki Bldg. 20F, 1-4-2, Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0013, Japan
Tel: (03) 5501-9150 Fax: (03) 5501-9159

URL: www.hoegh.com E-mail: autoliners.japan@hoegh.com