

**Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**I am very pleased to welcome the World Trotting Conference 2009 to Oslo and to Norway.**

**On behalf of the Norwegian Government, I extend our very best wishes to the International Trotting Association, and we hope that your World Conference and your General Assembly will be successful.**

**The International Trotting Association is doing very important work to promote good governance in international horse racing, by providing global rules and regulations for the sport.**

**We are happy that you have chosen Norway as the venue for this year's event, and we think you could have made no better choice !**

**I am sure that the Norwegian Trotting Association, representing the host country, will do its very best to meet your expectations. And Norway in May should offer spectacular views, so we hope that many of you will seize the opportunity to see more of the country than just Oslo, by joining the trips that have been prepared for you to other parts of the country.**

**When you travel in Norway, you will see that relatively limited parts of the country consists of arable land, and that the average size of our farms is small. At the same time there are large forests in Norway, that also mainly belong to private farms. The farms are located widespread around our long country, sometimes with long distances between them, unlike the village structure in Central Europe.**

**Our farm structure and topography therefore indicate that horses and horse breeding represent a long-standing tradition in Norway. The horse was need for transport and work. It is deeply rooted in our culture. The horse has a very special place in our hearts and our history. In the old farm structure, the stable was kept apart from the barn and the buildings for the other farm animals. The horse was so valuable , that if fire broke out, special precautions had been taken in this way to protect him.**

Horse racing and competitions with horses has an equally long tradition, right from the Viking Ages, and throughout the centuries. Modern trotting races started in the 1830s. The first publicly recorded race, with program and regulations, took place on the ice in the Oslo Fjord right in front of the City on 12. February 1832. The first race was won by a grey-blue gelding, by the name of Forsethblåen, with the km/t (kilometre time) of 1. 49.7.

In the years to come, the trotting competitions expanded quickly all around the country. The horses that took part in those competitions were of old Norwegian cold blood breed. We are enormously proud that the cold blood breed has been kept up in Norwegian trotting, and developed to the standards of to-day, where we are a leading nation in the category, together with Sweden and Finland. Almost half of our present trotter population is of cold blood breed.

The first standard bred warm blood horses started in races from the 1890s. But the organised trotting races, with full participation of both cold and warm blood horses, started with the introduction of totalizator racing in Norway on the 24. June 1928.

Since then, Norwegian trotting has expanded greatly. Also the Norwegian warm blood horses have developed, participating in international competitions, and have taken home prizes in internationally well known races in the United States and other European countries.

Politically, we have developed a well working relationship between the authorities in Norway and the Norwegian Trotting Association, as well as the Norwegian Jockey Club, to promote horse racing in Norway. A cornerstone in the cooperation is the licence from my Ministry to allow and regulate totalizator betting on horse races in Norway. This arrangement represent the main source of income for the horse racing industry of Norway.

My Government is a strong supporter of horse racing and breeding of horses. The horse industry gives an important contribution to our economy, and secures jobs and activities all over the country. Our agricultural policy aims at facilitating and promoting agricultural production for horses and breeding of horses. We see this as an important element in securing a viable agriculture and productive farms in all parts of our widespread country. Likewise, we support equine research in Norway at University level, as well as through specialized institutions like the Norwegian Horse Center.

**There are certainly challenges to modern horse racing , and your conference will deal with a number of them. In a global or international economy, many of the challenges also for trotting are transboundary, and must be met with international measures. At the same time it is equally important to pursue national policies designed to meet needs and concerns of the different countries.**

**My Government will follow these developments closely. We will support good governance of horse racing and betting internationally as well as nationally. We must have transparent and just rules, and high ethical standards. We must ensure a continued fair share of licensed betting for the sport, so that the incomes for breeding and training of race horses also in the future can contribute to securing jobs, to a viable countryside, to maintaining our cultural landscapes and indeed to provide the meaningful and socially valuable contact between horses and people, as the traditions have been throughout the centuries.**

**With this, it is a great pleasure for me to declare the 21. World Trotting Conference officially opened !**

**I wish you all the best of luck for your important work.**

**Thank you very much for your attention.**