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Statement

by

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at the

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Mr. President,
Excellencies, dear colleagues,
Distinguished delegates to the 67th General Assembly of the UN,

Events of recent months have once again illustrated the importance of the United Nations as a multilateral forum to address today's crises and challenges: the conflicts in Syria and Mali and the ongoing reform processes in many parts of the Arab World demonstrate that we can face those challenges only through concerted action.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Syria, thousands have lost their lives in their struggle for freedom and reforms through crimes committed by a regime that denies them every basic human right in order to stay in power. Austria condemns the systematic human rights violations and bloodshed in Syria in the strongest possible terms. More than 27,000 victims and some 2.5 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance are a stark reminder for each and every one of us that it is high time for the United Nations to finally act. The Security Council in particular must assume its responsibility for the ever aggravating situation in the country.

Violence has to stop immediately and both sides have to engage in a meaningful dialogue facilitated by the Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi. There will be no solution unless President Assad steps aside and gives way to forces of reason and reconciliation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Austria continues to fully support the ongoing transition processes in the Arab World. We welcome the efforts undertaken so far to lay the foundation for more open, inclusive and prosperous societies. We encourage the newly empowered authorities to fulfil their mandate for democratic change responsibly. The aspirations of the people for dignity and freedom must be satisfied, thereby contributing to peace and stability in the region.

In this context, let me reiterate my strongest condemnation of the recent attacks on diplomatic missions and personnel, especially the murder of ambassador Chris Stevens and three of his colleagues in Benghazi. Violence is never an acceptable response to the fundamental right for freedom of speech. To attack an embassy and its personnel is not only

contrary to international law but an attack on the very idea the United Nations stand for, namely the peaceful cooperation of member states to jointly build a better future.

Mr. President,

The still unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to gravely destabilize the Middle East. The terms of a negotiated and sustainable solution – two states with secure and mutually recognized borders – have been discussed over and over again and are broadly supported by the people and the international community. And yet we experienced a complete lack of progress in the last year. We thus call on the leadership on both sides to finally assume their responsibility and enable lasting peace and security for their children and future generations.

The situation in Mali also continues to be a matter of grave concern. Austria has been dismayed by the political turmoil with its disastrous effects on the Malian population. Growing insecurity and the continued deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation are calling for concerted action. The High-Level meeting on Wednesday was an important signal that we are moving in that direction. We fully support the efforts by ECOWAS and the African Union to try and find - together with the UN - a lasting political solution to the crisis in Mali and the Sahel region as a whole. Austria will advocate for increased support of the European Union to contribute to this end.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In light of the crises and challenges the international community is facing, Austria welcomes President Jeremic's timely choice to highlight the peaceful settlement of disputes in this year's general debate. Prevention is always better - and cheaper - than cure. Progress made in Sierra Leone, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, or Myanmar testifies how successful sustainable mediation efforts can be.

The peaceful settlement of disputes can only be achieved through open dialogue based on mutual respect. Austria has a long-standing tradition of promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue and are proud to host the 5th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in Vienna. This will take place on the 27 and 28 of February 2013 under the title "Responsible Leadership in Diversity and Dialogue". Austria highly values the contribution of youth as a transformative force. Therefore, the day before the Global Forum will be dedicated to the UNAOC Youth Event to benefit from their views.

In this context, I am also pleased to inform that the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue will be inaugurated on November 26, 2012 in Vienna. The Centre, a joint initiative by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Spain and the Republic of Austria, will certainly offer a significant contribution to the promotion of dialogue.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need to be clear: sustainable peace and development go hand in hand with the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These are universal values no human being should be denied. We must not falter until this goal is achieved.

In 2011, Austria was elected to the Human Rights Council. We fully support the Council and its mechanisms, especially the Universal Periodic Review. The Council is best placed to react swiftly in case of human rights emergencies. Its special sessions on Syria and Libya illustrated that the international community will not turn a blind eye on gross human rights violations and indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population. Human rights abuses must not go unpunished. Violations have to be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators must be held accountable before credible judicial institutions including the International Criminal Court.

Our membership of the Human Rights Council is an opportunity to continue working on the key priorities Austria pursued during the Security Council membership in 2009/2010: the protection of civilians, the safety of journalists, the implementation of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, the freedom of religion and belief, as well as the protection of children from violence and abuse.

The High-Level Meeting of Monday was an important opportunity to renew our commitment to the rule of law at the national and international levels. It now needs an adequate follow-up. As chair of the Group of Friends of the Rule of Law, Austria will provide concrete proposals for the upcoming report of the Secretary-General.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN Headquarters in Vienna are a hub for promoting peace and security. The work of the IAEA is more relevant than ever. I am pleased

that we can now also draw on additional services from the new Vienna Office for Disarmament Affairs.

Austria is deeply concerned about weapons of mass destruction programs and proliferation activities in several regions of the world. The creation of a Zone free from Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East is more urgent than ever. In this respect, let me underline that Iran must finally give credible evidence for the peaceful nature of its nuclear program and engage in earnest in the talks with the E3+3.

The continued inability to even initiate substantive multilateral disarmament negotiations is unacceptable. Austria is committed to working with other interested states to move forward on this crucial issue. In this context, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his continued support in this matter.

We need to move beyond a strictly military security approach that originates from the cold war period. It is time we change the discourse on nuclear weapons. Any use of nuclear weapons would be devastating for the whole world in its humanitarian and environmental effects. In the 21st century, such an existential threat to humankind can no longer be handled exclusively by a few states as a national security matter.

Austria is committed to strengthening and further developing international law and a humanitarian approach to advance the global disarmament and non-proliferation agenda. A lot has been achieved in the past two decades, as evidenced by the successful conclusions of the conventions to ban antipersonnel mines and cluster munitions. We hope that similar progress can be achieved in the Arms Trade Treaty in the coming months. Other member states should join the emerging consensus on regulating the trade in arms in a comprehensive manner.

Mr. President,

Vienna and its UN Headquarters also serve as a platform for the discussion on sustainable development. We welcome the decision of the Secretary General to establish an implementation office for his "Sustainable Energy for All" initiative. This will help advancing this important agenda.

Universal access to energy, the improvement of energy efficiency, as well as a higher share of renewable energy are goals that will help bring electricity to the billion and a half people worldwide lacking access.

Equally, it will help control greenhouse gas emissions and global warming, which is threatening the very existence of many a UN member state.

This year's Conference on Sustainable Development marked the beginning of a new era, renewing the perspectives for future generations via the Sustainable Development Goals, tailored to the needs of different countries or groups of states and regions. While implementing these new global goals, we should not cease our efforts towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals by its target date 2015.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Austria remains fully committed to an effective multilateral system. Therefore, we will support your efforts, Mr. President, and that of the Secretary General to further increase the effectiveness of our organization in order to better enable us to face the challenges of our time.

