

AUSTRIA



PERMANENT MISSION OF AUSTRIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement

by

H. E. Mr. Heinz Fischer

Federal President of the Republic of Austria

at the

68th Session of the General Assembly

of the United Nations

New York, 24 September 2013

Check against delivery!

Mr. President!
Excellencies!
Ladies and Gentlemen!

I thank you, Mr. President, for putting the discussion in this year's general debate under a very pertinent subject, namely "Setting the stage for the Post-2015 Development Agenda".

Shaping our planet's future after 2015 is now one of the crucial tasks ahead of us. While the international community remains committed to the full implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, work on the post-2015 agenda has started. One idea which has been brought to my particular attention is to "upgrade" the eradication of hunger from an indicator to a goal in this new agenda. More still needs to be done and everyone must contribute a fair share: States, International Organisations, the private sector, academia and civil society alike. Let me assure you that Austria will contribute her share as well.

Mr. President!

The International Community in its search for global security is currently facing major threats. The Middle East remains exposed to fundamental challenges. While we welcome the agreement reached between the United States and the Russian Federation on a framework for the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons arsenal, we believe that the Security Council should refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Accountability is necessary to stop the atrocities and prevent future crimes.

The path to democratic participation and a new beginning in Syria, the actual goal of the civilian protests that started two and a half years ago, remains crucial. Unfortunately, the parties seem to be firmly set on a military solution to the conflict. However it should be clear that the best way to achieving a sustainable solution can only be a political, negotiated one.

By now the civil war in Syria heavily affects all neighbouring countries. The conflict is a Syrian one; the consequences go far beyond its borders, it has, indeed, become international.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems to have been overshadowed by the upheavals in the region. I have followed events there for almost 40 years. I am convinced that what is needed for a solution is not only the willingness to negotiate in good faith but also to take into account the needs and sensibilities of the negotiating partner. I, for one, just cannot

believe that the value of settlements for Israel is bigger than the damage these settlements do as an obstacle to peace.

We welcome that the new US administration has devoted its full attention to this long-standing question and that direct negotiations have resumed at the end of July. What we need now is decisive leadership. We are convinced that a breakthrough in this central conflict would also mean a decisive step towards a stabilization of the entire region.

Mr. President!

While we continue to support the on-going transition processes in the Arab world, recent developments in the region have cast a shadow on the democratic achievements made so far. The difficult path to democracy will greatly depend on including all parts of society.

Mr. President!

Vienna and its UN-Headquarters serve as a platform for the discussion on sustainable development. Austria is very pleased that the Office of the Special Representative of the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative in Vienna started its activities on July 1st of this year. We welcome the Initiative's cooperation with thematic and regional hubs as well as other specialized organizations like UNIDO.

Austria is also the host-country of the newly established International Anti-Corruption Academy, an international organisation and centre of excellence, which already undertook several successful activities in fighting corruption as one of the most severe obstacles to development in all fields. I thank the Kingdom of Thailand for hosting its second Assembly of Parties in December 2013. Furthermore I would like to invite all States which have not yet done so to become members of the Anti-Corruption Academy.

Distinguished delegates!

This year's United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Global Forum took place in Vienna in February under the forward-looking theme: "Promoting Responsible Leadership in Diversity and Dialogue". More than 1.500 participants from governments, civil society, the private sector and the media as well as a Youth Forum of 150 outstanding and highly dedicated participants provided most valuable input for the discussions of the Global Forum.

In this context, I am also pleased to inform that the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural

Dialogue was inaugurated in Vienna on November 26th of last year. The Centre – a joint initiative by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Spain and the Republic of Austria – serves as an interactive platform for religious leaders, experts, and civil society alike.

Mr. President!

Multilateral cooperation can deliver solutions to global problems. The historic accomplishment of the Arms Trade Treaty was an important sign in this regard. We look forward to its earliest possible entry into force. At the same time, the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime is being challenged day by day through alarming developments. We were deeply shocked by the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We observe North Korea's continued development of nuclear weapons and missile capabilities. And we have new hope that the Iranian nuclear issue will be resolved by negotiations which, after the election of a new Iranian President, should be resumed shortly.

Similarly, the continued reliance on nuclear weapons and the limited progress towards nuclear disarmament are of great global concern. Nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation efforts can only be achieved together. Nuclear weapons should be stigmatized, banned and eliminated. The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have to be put at the center of our attention.

Mr. President!

While some might believe that there is a contradiction regarding the respect of cultural and religious differences on the one hand and the universality of human rights on the other, I am convinced that the one reinforces the other. If people and nations can count on human rights being guaranteed they will show respect for "the other".

The Human Rights Council, with its Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures, has, within a few years, developed into an effective instrument to address human rights violations and crisis situations in many instances. Austria, as a current member of the Council, is contributing to these efforts with targeted initiatives for the safety of journalists, the protection of religious minorities, or the promotion of the rights of the child.

We welcome the continuous trend towards universal abolition of the death penalty. However, too many countries still maintain a retentionist policy towards this cruel and inhuman form of punishment. Our diplomatic efforts therefore have to be re-enforced.

We are worried by increased violations of human rights based on sexual orientation or gender identity. To be threatened even with death because of being a homosexual is of utmost concern.

The 1993 Vienna Conference and the World Summit 2005 firmly placed human rights at the centre of UN activities. Respect for human rights is an indispensable prerequisite for peace, security and development.

Mr. President!

Last year's high-level meeting on the rule of law of the General Assembly provided an excellent opportunity to renew our commitment to the rule of law at the national and international levels.

The Austrian Government is considering to set up an Austrian Rule of Law Trust Fund to support international actors in strengthening the rule of law and to offer legal expertise or deploy legal experts free of charge to developing countries at their request.

International law and the rule of law are the foundations of the international system. Austria strongly believes that only an international system based on the rule of law can lead to lasting peace, security, economic development and social progress. This obviously is true in particular for the use of force which may only be applied in self-defense or if authorized by the UN Security Council.

In this spirit, let me confirm that Austria remains fully committed to an effective United Nations system.

In this connection I want to thank in particular Secretary General Ban ki-moon for his tireless efforts and commitment to peace, rule of law and human rights.

Thank you!
