

Statement of Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz

70. General Assembly of the United Nations

Check against delivery!

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

70 years ago the United Nations were founded as the collective answer to war and genocide, which had cost the lives of millions of people.

The principal idea of the UN was
to prevent war,
to uphold the respect for international law and human rights and
to promote social and economic progress.

I myself have not even lived through half of this period.
Nevertheless, I believe that today - 70 years later - we all have to ask ourselves
if we have really succeeded.

- We are facing a record high of over 50 violent conflicts, reaching from Syria and Iraq to Yemen, Sudan and Somalia.
- We are facing a rise of radicalisation and extremism.
- And we are facing the highest number of refugees since World War Two.

Nearly 60 Million people worldwide are on the move as refugees or internally displaced persons.

Alone 4 Million of them are Syrians who have left their country fleeing from civil war and terror.
Every day over 40.000 people flee from their homes in search of peace, security or a new life.

This challenge is not limited to one region or to one continent. This is a global challenge!
It concerns the Mediterranean region, but also South Asia and large parts of Africa.
Europe is currently also witnessing a huge flow of refugees in particular from the Wider Middle East.

These global refugee flows pose serious problems for the countries of origin and transit as well as for the countries of destination.

But all affected countries and regions have one thing in common:
No country and no region can solve this crisis alone.
And no single measure can provide a solution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need a comprehensive approach covering the whole refugee routes:
the countries of origin, transit and destination!

Which organisation if not the UN can provide the basis for this collective action?

And which organisation if not the UN can contribute to this comprehensive approach?

If we want to reduce the number of refugees I believe that we have to focus our efforts on three key areas:

First we have to confront the root causes in the countries of origin:

Civil wars, massive human rights violations and terrorism.

In this context we have to intensify our fight against Da'esh and terrorist groups.
They have to be neutralised and defeated!

In the case of Syria it also means that we have to push harder for a closing of ranks in the region.
We will only be able to achieve any meaningful progress if major regional players such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt and Iran act in concert.

And finally it means that we have to bring all relevant parties to the Syrian civil war on the table, as UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura tries to do.

Let me be clear: that does not mean that the current political leadership of Syria can be part of a long term solution. It has brought endless harm to the people of Syria.
But if you want to make peace, you don't only talk to your friends.

Secondly we need more unity on international level.

Huge efforts have already been made -
but the UN and its Member States can and should do more!

We will only be able to make a difference if the United States and Russia pull in one direction.

The UN Security Council has to demonstrate unity.
We need a mandate not only for action against Da'esh but also for the protection of civilians.

This should include the establishment of safe and buffer zones which would increase the security of the people and make access for humanitarian aid much easier.

Action by the Security Council would offer many countries the possibility to join in and offer their support.

Our position is clear: Austria would stand ready to contribute to such a UN-peace operation.

Thirdly we need a change of system.

A system which allows only the fittest or those rich enough to pay the smugglers to reach a safe haven like Europe is wrong.

The current system is in fact indirectly sponsoring smugglers!

More than 24.000 migrants and refugees died on their way to Europe since 2000. The pictures of refugees drowned in the Mediterranean Sea or suffocated in trucks will continue to haunt us.

We therefore need a change of system!

We need to create the possibility for refugees to apply for asylum already in their countries of origin or neighbouring countries.

The United Nations could help in the establishment of such reception and information centres which would allow to introduce resettlement programs.

In my opinion trafficking in human beings is one of the worst crimes.

We should consider systematic and large-scale smuggling as a crime against humanity so that the perpetrators can finally be brought to justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is another crisis area we shouldn't forget about.

Last year, like most of you I referred to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as probably the most serious challenge to peace and security in Europe.

One year later, we still cannot see a positive development.

The conflict is ongoing, the number of deaths has even increased and the socio-economic consequences are huge.

There is only one way ahead:

A peaceful settlement based on dialogue and negotiation.

We must find a solution that provides for a free and stable Ukraine, which enjoys strong ties with both the European Union and the Russian Federation.

In this respect the Minsk Agreement is and remains the only option on the table!

There is no alternative to implementing this agreement.

All parties have to live up to their commitments.

In this context let me underline the crucial work the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is doing.

The special Monitoring Mission and the Trilateral Contact group play a unique role for a peaceful settlement.

The OSCE deserves our full support and Austria will do its utmost to contribute to its work, especially during our OSCE chairmanship in 2017.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All these conflicts show that 70 years after its establishment we need the United Nations more than ever.

But in some areas the UN is also pushed to its breaking point.
It urgently needs reforms in order to be prepared for the future.

What can be the way forward?

Firstly, we have to remind ourselves of the purposes and principles of the Charter.
It is and remains our backbone.
Failure is guaranteed if we don't respect it!

Secondly, we have to look at the functioning of its main bodies.
We need a Security Council that is united and can act swiftly.
We welcome the efforts to improve the work of the Security Council.
We support the initiatives to suspend the use of the veto in case of mass atrocities.

In order to be able to address global challenges we need a UN that is capable of taking action – and a Security Council that is more representative, accountable and transparent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We highly value the fact that one of the headquarters of the United Nations is in Vienna and we will continue to support it actively.
We remain committed to act as a place for international dialogue, such as the Iran nuclear talks that took place in Vienna this year.

We will also continue to contribute to all diplomatic initiatives for a better world.

In this sense one key area for us is nuclear disarmament.

The NPT Review Conference last May failed to reach an agreement.
But there is a growing international momentum on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

At this conference I delivered a joint statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons on behalf of 159 States.
And the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons last December resulted in a Humanitarian Pledge which has been endorsed by 116 States!

Austria, together with co-sponsors, will table several resolutions on the humanitarian initiative. We hope that they will receive broad support.

70 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons still pose one of the most serious threats to humankind.

I can assure you that Austria will fight for a world free of nuclear weapons to make our world a safer place!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The global challenges we are facing require a strong United Nations! We deeply value Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts.

The UN and the Secretary General can continue to count on our continuous support.

Thank you for your attention!

Source:

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