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80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Statement by H.E. Ms. Beate Meinl-Reisinger Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria

Check against delivery!

Madam President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the Austrian Foreign Minister, it is both an honour and a profound responsibility to address this Assembly today.

Yet I am not only a foreign minister and a party leader – I am also a mother of three daughters. When I reflected about why I am coming to New York to participate in the General Assembly, it became clear to me:

The values of the United Nations are the very same values that my husband and I try to pass down to our children.

- That conflict and dispute can and must be resolved by mediation.
- That every human being – regardless of their offspring, sex, religion or race - deserves dignity and owns the same rights.
- That rules have to be followed by everyone and big problems can only be solved together.
- And, that every one of us has the responsibility to act not only in their own interest, but to work for a better future for everyone.

I suppose that all parents around the world share a common wish: for their children to grow up with the promise of a bright future.

Especially now. Especially in critical times like these. Especially in times when these values and simple rules are threatened by disrespect.

Madame President,

When I listen to my oldest daughter - a teenager - I sometimes get a feeling that weighs heavily on me. Namely, that for our children's generation, the future does not seem brighter than the present. We all can sense that there are fundamental fears – fears of war and conflict, of climate change, of radicalization, of fundamentalism, of societal division.

That burdens me deeply as a mother - but also as a leader:

I believe that the most important promise leaders can make is to do everything in their power to ensure that our future is at least a little better than the past.

Yet today, we cannot close our eyes to the gap between this aspiration and the harsh reality we live in.

For example in Gaza, where devastation, starvation, and despair have reached terrible proportions.

For Austria, it is clear: The attacks of Hamas on Israel on October 7th were horrible and beyond imaginable brutality. They must be condemned by all of us.

We have said it from day one and will continue to do so: Hamas must immediately and unconditionally free all hostages, end its rule in Gaza and hand over its weapons.

At the same time, nothing justifies the devastating humanitarian catastrophe we are witnessing in Gaza. Civilians must be protected at all times. There is no justification for violating international law, including international humanitarian law. Austria is not only because of our own historical responsibility a friend of Israel, but the actions of the Israeli government break my heart.

This war must end. The hostages must be freed. And humanitarian aid must reach the suffering civilians in Gaza as soon as possible.

Our vision is clear: a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East. Two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders.

Austria's support for the Two-State Solution is not just words — we have supported the Palestinian Authority for many decades. At that point in the future when this step can make the most meaningful contribution to peace and when the right conditions have been met we will also recognize Palestine as a state.

We welcome President Abbas' condemnation of the October 7th attacks, his call to free the hostages, the prospect of elections and his demand to disarm Hamas. We thank all those who took a huge effort to end this war and bring solutions for peace and security to this region. These are steps toward peace — and Austria will work with all partners to turn them into reality.

Madame President,

We all see the basic principles of the Charter challenged in Ukraine, where Russia has been waging an illegal and unprovoked war of aggression against its neighbour. A very brutal war with horrific numbers of dead and wounded – soldiers and civilians.

We support US efforts to end the war through high-level diplomacy. Since the beginning of the war and especially since March many initiatives have been launched to end this war. Ukraine is ready for peace, but instead, Russia continues its attacks on cities and villages, on schools, hospitals, and kindergartens. Russia even escalates towards EU and ~~NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)~~ countries. This is unacceptable.

Austria calls urgently for an immediate ceasefire — as a precondition for genuine talks to end this war. Russia cannot speak of peace during the day and bomb during the night! And it is absolutely clear that it is up to Ukraine and Europe to decide on their future and security architecture.

But Ukraine and Gaza are not alone.

- In Sudan, civilians face massacres while a humanitarian catastrophe unfolds on an unparalleled scale.
- In Haiti, gang violence and organized crime hold an entire nation hostage.
- In Afghanistan, women and girls are denied their most basic human rights.

Against the backdrop of rising insecurity and armed conflicts, countries are now heavily investing in security and defense - also in Europe. We all have the duty to protect our citizens. This is necessary, as we are confronted with the biggest war on our continent since 1945.

But let us not fool ourselves: growing nuclear arsenals or uncontrolled autonomous weapons systems will not make our world a safer one. While we all must ensure the safety and security of our populations - we must never give up on international humanitarian law and we must ban weapons which kill indiscriminately.

Excellencies,

Today, we face growing disregard for the UN Charter itself, a rising tide of coercion and unilateralism, a dangerous erosion of trust.

The UN was born out of the ashes of war and the promise of “never again.” Do we – does the UN – still live up to this promise? Is the UN still fit for purpose?

For us, it is clear: We must not fail our children!

Austria is ready to do its part to fulfill the UN's promise:

To engage in open and fair dialogue.

To build true partnerships.

To rebuild trust that has been eroded by reckless unilateralism.

It is with this ambition that Austria presented its candidacy for the UN Security Council for 2027–28 - already back in 2011!

We strongly hope to count on your valuable support at the elections in June next year.

Why should you support us?

Austria is a rather small country and militarily neutral. We are a reliable host country of one of the UN headquarters in Vienna and support the Secretary General's reform efforts. Many negotiations in Vienna that have bridged divides and saved lives. We know that small countries depend on the rule of law, on diplomacy, transparency and inclusiveness. That's why we will serve the entire international community if elected.

We champion international law, the protection of civilians, disarmament and UN peace keeping. More than a hundred thousand Austrians have served as peacekeepers around the world.

We are a reliable development partner and make our contribution to the enormous challenge of climate change. No, denial will not help us to adapt to this challenge! This is why Austria is proud to co-chair the UN Climate Security Mechanism this year.

Excellencies,

We must not fail our populations. They trust us to protect peace, prosperity and stability and healthy United Nations that delivers answers to global challenges.

We must not fail our children! We must ensure that young people growing up today can look to the future with confidence.

Eighty years ago, our predecessors gave the world a Charter — and a promise for a better future.

Let us renew that promise, for our children and our children's children.

I thank you.

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