

Statement by H.E. Mr. Wolfgang Waldner
State Secretary for Foreign Affairs
Austria

07-12-11 PM

Mr. Chairman,
High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset let me thank the UNHCR for convening this intergovernmental meeting at ministerial level in order to commemorate the anniversaries of the **two pillars of the international protection regime**, the 1951 Convention relating to the **Status of Refugees** and the 1961 Convention on the **Reduction of Statelessness**.

Today, more than 60 years after the enormous suffering of civilians during WW II and its aftermath, these Conventions are as relevant as ever. Conflicts around the world, many of them protracted for several years, are still leading to **huge scale displacement**. The steadily growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons, amounting to more than **43 million displaced people worldwide**, must give rise to serious concern.

Austria has constantly proven her strong commitment to the protection of refugees. Since 1945 more than **2 million refugees have come to Austria**, out of which about 700.000 stayed in the country. Over the past ten years, alone more than 45.000 were granted an international protection status in Austria. Currently, our authorities and reception facilities face **one of the highest numbers of applicants** per capita in

Europe – a great responsibility we are taking very seriously. And I dare say that Austria's full commitment to the Geneva Convention has resulted in considerably high standards for asylum seekers concerning procedures as well as reception conditions.

Mr. Chairman,

We have no time for self-complacency. The challenges ahead are overwhelming. As a Member of the European Union, Austria actively supports the efforts to establish a **Common European Asylum System**.

At the same time, on the national level, Austria is constantly re-evaluating and adjusting her **domestic legislation and practices** in the field of **refugee protection**. In this context, UNHCR is a **key partner** for us and we appreciate UNHCR's expertise and experience. We therefore actively participated in the **UNHCR Quality Assurances Initiative**.

Against the background of this year's anniversaries and in recognition of UNHCR's valuable work towards improving the international protection regime, Austria is **committed to further strengthening its cooperation** with UNHCR. Let me mention the following steps in this respect:

- The Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, which has the main responsibility for refugee protection and integration, is currently finalizing a **Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR** aiming at **intensified cooperation**. Austria wishes to create an even more solid basis for UNHCR's regular involvement in Austrian refugee related policies and their implementation in order to ensure the highest possible quality standards. We will also focus on fostering the

integration of refugees into our society. Another important aspect will be the **protection of victims of human trafficking**, a priority issue for Austria. Those groups that UNHCR takes care of are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking.

- Austria shares the concern of UNHCR regarding statelessness and supports the efforts to **promote the accession** of further countries to the **Statelessness Conventions**. In this context, Austria took an important step a few years ago by becoming party to the **1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons**. Austria will be ready to review her implementation of the convention with regard to the **procedures for the determination whether a person is stateless** on the basis of the guidelines which are currently being elaborated by UNHCR.
- Let me also point out that the **protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is a key concern for us** in the Human Rights Council. Austria regularly presents the Resolution on the human rights of IDPs and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

Turning now to UNHCR's recent and current activities, I would like to express Austria's sincere **appreciation for the work and achievements of the High Commissioner** and his dedicated staff. 2011 has been a year full of extraordinary challenges for UNHCR. Situations of massive displacement especially in Africa and the Arab World required UNHCR to respond rapidly, while continuing its engagement in countries or regions with protracted displacement problems.

The **crisis in the Horn of Africa** has once more underlined the increasing complexity of situations of displacement, exacerbated by environmental or climate-induced phenomena. I am glad that Austria was able to commit **extra-budgetary resources** to the difficult work of UNHCR in this region. We commend UNHCR on its rapid and efficient response and we would like to take this opportunity to thank the High Commissioner for his personal commitment and leadership.

In conclusion, let me stress again Austria's **strong commitment to UNHCR's engagement** in favour of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons. UNHCR will remain indispensable in this respect. Let me assure you that Austria will continue to be a **reliable partner and supporter** of UNHCR.

Thank you.