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Statement by
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CHECK AGAINST DERIVERY

Madam High Commissioner, Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies,

“The stars of eternal truth and right have always shone in the firmament of human understanding. The process of bringing them down to earth, remolding them into practical forms, imbuing them with vitality, and then making use of them, has been a long one.” These are the words of Bertha von Suttner, the Austrian writer and peace activist who was the first woman awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 100 years ago. Actively engaged in the international peace movement she often faced discrimination and criticism for her “unwomanly” political engagement.

Fortunately things have changed and active participation in political life is no longer considered “unwomanly”. Nevertheless, women continue to face discrimination and denial of their rights. Let me address in this context a growing phenomenon representing the denial of virtually all human rights: **trafficking in persons** – the majority of its victims being women and girls.

I very much welcome last year’s decision by the Commission to appoint a Special Rapporteur to highlight the human rights implications of trafficking. This new UN mechanism reinforces the many initiatives taken at national or regional level, like the appointment of the OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Ms. Helga Konrad.

Austria attaches great importance to the fight against trafficking in persons and is pursuing a holistic approach based on prevention, protection and prosecution. To this end, my

government established a Task Force on Trafficking in Persons last year. Prevention initiatives comprehend both the supply and the demand sides. The government also funds a specialized victim's protection centre, which offers secure shelter, psychological, social and legal assistance and other support to victims of trafficking. Furthermore Austria is actively engaged in regional cooperation in particular with the countries of South Eastern Europe, including within the framework of the Stability Pact, in the areas of prevention, training, law enforcement, victim protection and reintegration. Based on Austria's experiences I am convinced that we must not treat trafficking in human beings exclusively as a "law and order" issue. Instead, a victim-centred approach is most effective in curbing this serious crime and horrendous human rights violation.

Mr. Chairperson,

What can we do to overcome the denial of rights? What can we do to finally remold these "eternal rights" into practical forms, to imbue them with vitality?

First and foremost, we need to focus on education.

This is the best way to ensure the empowerment of women and the creation of opportunities. During the past two decades there has been a tremendous increase in the enrolment of girls in schools. Still 130 million children worldwide are not in school. Two out of three of them are girls. A lot still needs to be done to reach the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and gender equality. There is no tool more effective for development and poverty reduction than the empowerment of women. Austria's development cooperation therefore focuses on the promotion of education, health standards and economic independence of women, many of them in cooperation with UNIFEM.

Education must also encompass **human rights education**. Programmes in human rights education are pivotal in promoting a culture of human rights and understanding. I, therefore,

attach great importance to concrete follow-up to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education. In the framework of the Human Security Network Austria developed a training manual on human rights. This manual "Understanding Human Rights" has – among others - been translated into all official languages of the UN and is adaptable to different countries and target groups. It has already been used in Austria and in countries as diverse as Bosnia and Herzegovina, China and Mali. Austria is most interested to make it available to other governments and national human rights institutions.

Secondly, we need to focus on implementation.

While the elaboration of covenants and conventions, norms and standards in the area of human rights has been a tremendous achievement we need to be more pro-active on their implementation. We fully share and support the High Commissioner's approach in this regard. Austria welcomes the Action 2 reform initiative aimed at consolidating the efforts of the entire UN system in advancing the protection of human rights so that international standards, norms and laws can have practical effects. I agree that protection of human rights can be ensured only when national laws, institutions and procedures effectively work in this direction. This is why also one of the main priorities of Austria's development cooperation is strengthening human rights and democracy and promotion of the rule of law and good governance. Let me also reiterate that Austria is firmly committed to fully cooperate with human rights treaty bodies and the special procedures of this Commission.

Among the areas where there are gaps in implementation are the situation of **internally displaced persons** and of **minorities**, two issues on which Austria is presenting initiatives at the Commission:

More than 25 million people worldwide are uprooted within their own country, be it by natural disaster, or by conflict. The vast majority of them are women and children. The effective assistance to and protection of **internally displaced persons** is therefore a key challenge

for the governments concerned and the international community. In this respect we strongly support the approach of the new Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Prof. Walter Kälin, to encourage governments to incorporate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into domestic laws and policies.

Minorities number as many as 1 billion people, or 15 to 20 per cent of the world's population. The promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities enrich the cultural diversity and heritage of society and contribute to political and social stability and peace. At the same time, however, they often suffer disproportionately the effects of conflict and discrimination. Taking up the Secretary General's call to move from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention, there is a clear need for the Commission to step up its efforts regarding minorities through the establishment of an appropriate mechanism.

Last but not least, we have to move forward on reform.

Austria welcomes the fact that the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change recognizes the protection of human rights as one of the central missions of the United Nations. Together with partners in the EU Austria has always advocated such emphasis on human rights as well as the focus on the concepts of prevention and of responsibility to protect. Austria strongly supports the ongoing reform process and has recently submitted a non-paper on "Recommendations on the Strengthening of the Rule of Law" to the Secretary General in New York.

In particular, we welcome recommendations aimed at increasing the integration of human rights into the United Nations system and at strengthening OHCHR's capacity to effectively respond to human rights challenges. Concerning the reform of the human rights machinery, we should seize the momentum of engaging into a constructive dialogue, encompassing governmental as well as non-governmental representatives to go beyond a mere

identification of problems. Over decades the Commission has established an excellent record in standard setting. Building on these standards, the Commission must promote compliance with these standards and also address specific human rights situations through formulating credible and consistent responses of the international community to serious violations of human rights. After all, as it was affirmed at the World Conference on Human Rights, the promotion and protection of all human rights is a legitimate concern of the international community.

Let me conclude by quoting the most recent Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Prof. Wangari Maathai. Thinking globally and acting locally she has served as inspiration for many in the fight for democratic rights and has especially encouraged women to better their situation. Her words can serve all of us as an inspiration for the coming weeks: "Let us intensify our commitment to our people, to reduce conflicts and poverty and thereby improve their quality of life. Let us embrace democratic governance, protect human rights and protect our environment. I am confident that we shall rise to the occasion. I have always believed that solutions to most of our problems must come from us."

Thank you very much!