

United Nations Forum on Minority Issues
Fourth Session – “Guaranteeing the rights of minority women”
“Minority women and girls and the right to education”

Geneva, 29 – 30 November 2011

Statement by Austria

Mme Chair,

First of all, let me congratulate you for your appointment as chair of the Forum which is focusing this year on the important topic of guaranteeing the rights of minority women. Your personal and professional experience, the fact of being the first woman of African descent to hold the position of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Panama as well as your participation at the second session of the Forum clearly demonstrate your commitment and your awareness of the unique challenges that women belonging to minorities frequently experience worldwide.

Since the establishment of the Forum, Austria attached great importance to this unique platform for dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to persons belonging to minorities involving a wide range of stakeholders. Our support to this issue also includes the main-sponsorship of resolutions on the rights of persons belonging to minorities in the Human Rights Council and the 3rd Committee of the General Assembly.

Mme Chair,

Let me now turn to the issue of minority women and girls and the right to education. We share the assessment that ensuring equal access to education for minority girls and women remains a considerable challenge and that effective measures at all levels are needed. In this context, Austria would like to share the following national experiences:

The aim of Austria's education policy is to create and ensure equality of opportunities for all regardless of their linguistic, social or cultural background. For instance, migrant education in Austrian schools is based on three pillars: support structures in

German as Second language, mother tongue teaching and intercultural education to promote understanding, tolerance and mutual respect. However, statistics have shown that the drop-out rate before the end of the compulsory school years amounts 15 % of students with migration background compared to 5% of the Austrian students. In addition, the drop-out rate of girls is higher than of boys with migration background.

In order to effectively address those challenges, a National Plan of Action on Integration was adopted in 2010. It includes specific measures like improvement of teachers training in intercultural skills, the promotion of individualized forms of teaching as well as the promotion of pre-school attendance for children with migration background in order to raise the level of German language skills before entering the school system. Moreover, specific programmes have been designed to support minority children as well as their parents. One example is the programme “Mothers learn German” offering German language courses for immigrant women.

Another initiated project is MIKA which stands for migration-skills-literacy and addresses the problematic issue of illiteracy amongst immigrants. Female immigrants are particularly affected by this phenomenon. The project aims at increasing the literacy rate through courses, awareness raising and the creation of networks amongst different actors at all levels. Furthermore, learning centres providing female immigrants a variety of educational measures with the aim to support them on the way to autonomy have been established.

An additional principle of our education policy is gender equality which is constantly mainstreamed and implemented into our school system. To give an example, Austria has introduced in 2007 Gender Days focusing on topics like “Gender stereotypes” or “Migration and Gender” and aiming at raising awareness and foster dialogue on gender equality. Moreover, gender mainstreaming has been included as a leading principle in the curricular of teacher training institutions.

Mme Chair,

Despite all the achievements made, there are still many challenges which remain. We are confident that the discussions at the Forum as well as the recommendations made will further contribute to improve the situation on the ground.

I thank you.