

Sixth Session — United Nations Forum on Minority issues
"Guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities"

"Promotion of constructive interfaith dialogue, consultation and exchange"

Geneva, 26 — 27 November

2013 Statement by Austria

Mme Chair,

Austria is convinced that intercultural and interfaith dialogue play a critical role not only in promoting and protecting the rights and security of religious minorities but first and foremost in creating and promoting tolerant and inclusive multi-faith societies.

This also includes churches, religious organizations and religious leaders who often significantly contribute to build tolerant and inclusive societies. They have an imperative role to play inter alia by actively engaging in promoting fundamental rights through education and awareness raising initiatives, by standing up for victims of discrimination, by reaching out to support and advocate for the rights of religious Minority groups as well as by engaging actively within their community with members of different faiths.

In Austria we have a long-standing tradition of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and it is one of our priorities at the national and international level. Among several initiatives we have initiated an annual seven day Muslim-Jewish Conference in which 16 countries take part and which is aimed at breaking down established stereotypes and increasing dialogue as well as a Christian Islamic Encounter centre which works in districts with multicultural populations.

Since 2009 annual dialog training courses for imams coming from Turkey have been organised. The aim of these courses is to prepare imams for their work in Austria by familiarizing them with Austrian laws and traditions. Furthermore, dialogue training courses took place for women representatives as well as "dialogue experts" from the Islamic Community in Austria in 2011 and 2012. These courses have been co-funded by the European Integration Fund of the European Union. Another example is the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University.

At the international level, Austria is equally active with regard to bringing together different religions and cultures. For instance within the Alliance of Civilizations which has a strong capacity in promoting a culture of tolerance and dialogue, Austria hosted the 5th Annual Forum of the Alliance in February this year which focused on the issue of promotion and protection of the right to religious freedom in the context of religious pluralism. In addition, it is worth mentioning that Austria together with Spain and Saudi Arabia belongs to the three founding States which established the "King Abdullah Bin Abdullaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue" in Vienna.

Mme Chair,

Before concluding, let me emphasise that within the United Nation's system a wide range of mechanisms exist to facilitate dialogue. We need to make sure that they are fully used to respond to our expectations. At same time it is our own responsibility to make the best use of them.

I thank you.

