

Seventh Session – United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

Panel IV – “Improving prevention of violence and atrocity crimes”

Geneva, 25 November 2014

Statement by Austria

Mr. President,

First of all, we would like to congratulate you to your appointment as chair of the Forum. As main sponsor of the resolutions on minorities issues in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, Austria welcomes this year's focus on preventing violence and atrocity crimes against minorities. Given the worldwide rise of violence and discrimination against different ethnic and religious groups, this is a particularly timely topic and follows last year's useful discussions in this Forum on religious minorities. Many of the considerations and conclusions from last year remain in our view particularly pertinent also for this year's topic under discussion.

Serious human rights violations are a harbinger of impending atrocities. Governments, civil society and the international community all have to be alert to warning signs much earlier. This means first and foremost that we need to fully comply with our legal obligations under international law and with international as well as regional standards of minority rights protection. It requires at the same time our unequivocal commitment to build, with the support of international and regional institutions and mechanisms, resilience of societies by ensuring that the rule of law is respected, that access to justice is guaranteed and that all human rights are protected. In this respect we should be prepared to introduce special measures for minorities at the national level in order to ensure that their rights are being respected.

In the Forum's draft recommendations, the key role of good and inclusive governance and the participation of minorities at all political levels is underlined. The establishment of dedicated institutions to take the lead in mainstreaming attention to minorities and in monitoring their situation is also suggested. In line with these recommendations, Austria has set up Advisory Councils for each of the six legally recognized ethnic groups to advise the Government on minority issues. Matters concerning minority issues outside the Ethnic Groups Act are being dealt with in the framework of Austria's integration policy at federal and regional level which is being developed in close dialogue with all minority groups concerned. In addition, the Austrian National Action Plan on Integration provides measures to promote intercultural understanding.

At the international level UN institutions, funds, programs and organizations must be prepared to be able to actively contribute to the task of preventing atrocity crimes and the human rights monitoring mechanisms can fulfill an effective role and also contribute to the task of prevention. In this context we should explore further the possibility to recognize individuals or civil society organizations wishing to publicly address the United Nations as petitioners regarding violations of their rights and prejudices against minority groups.

As an important step towards strengthening early warning and prevention mechanisms, we would like to express our appreciation for the UN Secretary General's "Rights Up Front" initiative which includes a strong commitment by the United Nations to make sure that whenever patterns of violations provide clear warning signs of looming crises, high level engagement and leadership are activated.

Mr. President,

Diversity and pluralism pose no risk to our societies, but are a source of development, progress and peace. There may be many different models for the political participation, but they all share one common goal: the promotion and protection of persons belonging to minorities and their integration into society. Austria will continue its engagement in this direction and we are confident that the ideas and recommendations voiced at this Forum will form a good basis for further progress. In this context, we consider the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes prepared by the Special Advisor on the Prevention of the Genocide as a particularly useful tool in this context.

Thank you very much.