

## **Eighth Session- United Nations Forum on Minority Issues**

Panel IV- *Challenges of criminal justice systems in addressing the needs and demands of minorities*

Geneva, 25 November 2015

### **Statement by Austria**

Mr. President,

As main sponsor of the resolutions on minorities' issues and on the administration of justice in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, Austria particularly welcomes this year's thematic focus of the forum on minority issues. The forum continues to provide a unique opportunity for states and all relevant stakeholders to discuss challenges related to minorities and to share best practices, including with regard to our efforts to develop criminal justice systems that guarantee the rights of minorities.

In all parts of the world, persons belonging to national or ethnic religious and linguistic minorities face increased exposure to violations of their rights in their contacts with the criminal justice systems. Unequal treatment of minorities occur at every stage of the criminal justice process starting from disproportionate targeting and unfair treatment by police and other front-line law enforcement officials to pre-trial detention and discriminatory sentencing practices.

Overcoming such challenges requires a minority rights based approach which among others ensures effective participation of minorities in all aspects of the criminal justice process and administration of Justice.

Austria has over the last years taken a number of important initiatives in this direction. For instance Information campaigns and events are being organized to attract second generation migrants with the aim of increasing the percentage of police officers with migration background in a medium to long term timeframe.

However, as the Special Rapporteur highlights in the conclusions of her report, members of a minority are less likely to engage with, or participate as actors within criminal justice institutions as long as the members of that minority face active discrimination within the system

Austria has tried to tackle this issue by taking measures aimed at addressing racist assaults against minorities in prisons by fellow inmates or staff. In this context, extensive training is

provided to prison staff through programs that are developed with an aim to allow them to deal more adequately with people from different backgrounds.

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 ways in addressing the challenges that minorities face within their criminal justice systems, but irrespectively of national contexts they all should share a common objective: the promotion and protection of persons belonging to minorities and their integration into society. Austria will continue its strong 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.

Thank you very much.