

Tenth Session- United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

Item IV. Minority Youth and the media in the digital age: acceptance and opportunity

Geneva, 1 December 2017

Statement by Austria

Ms. Moderator.

On behalf of Austria let me start by welcoming you back to the minority forum and express once again our sincere gratitude for the great contribution you have made to this institution over the past years.

We would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Kurdi for his election as chairperson of the 10th session of the minority forum.

This year, a 16 year old student in Austria created the first hijab-wearing emoji icon, which was then approved by the Unicode Consortium and is now available on i-phones. This is just a small example but it nicely shows how young people can contribute to better represent the diversity of our societies in digital media.

Austria welcomes this year's focus on minority youth and we have followed with great interest the discussions regarding the opportunities and challenges for minority youth with the media in the digital age.

There is no doubt that digital media offers many benefits including for minorities. It gives them an opportunity to efficiently disseminate information about their rights, to promote awareness and acceptance of diversity and to give voice to their concerns and views. When misused however, digital media can also serve as a platform for discrimination, exclusion and the promotion of negative stereotypes or even hate speech, posing a serious threat to minority cultures, hampering their full integration into society and potentially even leading to large-scale violence.

In Austria, we have recently strengthened the provisions on hate speech of the Austrian Criminal Code, with all minorities being protected groups.

Legislation however is only part of a larger toolbox to address these challenges. We believe it is equally important for States to proactively promote cultural diversity, inclusion and education to tolerance.

In Austria we have taken a number of important initiatives in this regard:

The Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Integration Fund have awarded for the sixth year in a row the so called "Journalists Prize for Integration". The award recognizes journalists in the categories of print, internet, TV and radio, who through differentiated and substantiated work have made a decisive contribution in the area of integration.

Furthermore, our Ministry is also supporting the "biber academy", a project providing scholarships to young people with migration background to prepare for the media and communications sector. This year, three graduates of the Academy made it to the top 30 young journalists in Austria.

In the field of education, an online learning platform was developed in November 2016 as part of the TOGETHER:AUSTRIA programme, offering 100 ready-to-use sets of instruction materials that make it easier for teachers to take up the subject of integration at their schools. The materials can be downloaded from the TOGETHER:AUSTRIA website free of charge.

Ms. Moderator,

It is our firm conviction that diversity and pluralism are a source of development, progress and peace for our societies. Austria will thus continue its strong engagement for the promotion and protection of persons belonging to minorities and their full integration into society. We are confident that the ideas and recommendations voiced at this Forum will form a good basis for further progress.

Before closing, Austria would like to offer the following recommendation. "States should proactively promote cultural diversity, inclusion and education to tolerance in cooperation with all types of media including digital media to disseminate information about minority rights, address disinformation and to give voice to minorities' concerns and views."

Thank you very much.