

UN Human Rights Council 17th session
Consideration of UPR – Austria 7th June 2011

Mr President,

Ever since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the United Nations has done everything in its power to uphold, promote and protect the human rights of every individual and so build the 'foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'. Building that foundation calls for the assistance and cooperation of others and the commitment of funds.

Regrettably, over the years Austria's actual contribution to Official Development Assistance (ODA) has lagged far behind its pledges. It was thus reassuring to note the statement by Ambassador Dr. Tichy that Austria would accept the recommendation in the Universal Periodic Review that Austria increase its ODA to 0.7 per cent of the country's gross national income. Although we welcome the Austrian Government's repeated commitment to achieving international development goals and bringing its ODA closer to the 0.7 per cent it had pledged, a note of caution must be struck. If this particular UPR recommendation is to be met, binding legislation and a marked increase in development cooperation funding are called for.

This takes on particular significance in the light of the major cuts envisaged in the upcoming budget of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the entity responsible for bilateral development aid. Over the period 2012-2015, the cumulative reduction in expenditures will be in the order of €90 million. Moreover, the cuts will be disproportionately greater in the field of bilateral aid: the very segment directed towards reducing poverty. By introducing this budgetary measure, Austria has ineluctably deprived hundreds of thousands of people the chance to overcome hunger and poverty and assert their human rights.

The current trend is more towards increasing debt relief, supporting international financial institutions and promoting economic cooperation. Austria has thus failed not only in terms of its contribution to ODA, but also in terms of the content and thrust of its development policy. We are thus critical of the shift in Austrian development policy away from combating poverty to setting new priorities and focusing on the Black Sea region and the Danube Basin, where Austria primarily pursues its foreign trade interests. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Austria and its realisation and propagation of human rights stand in the limelight. Austria should not thwart its commitment to peace, development and stability by neglecting its bilateral development cooperation. By so doing, it compromises its contribution to bolstering human capital, improving infrastructure and increasing social, economic and political rights that are enshrined in the MDGs. It should be remembered that the provision of technical assistance enhances a recipient country's capacity to deal with the challenges of both development and human rights.

