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## Austrian Candidacy for the United Nations Human Rights Council 2019-2021 - Pledges and Commitments -

### Building Bridges for Human Rights

**Austria is entirely committed to the full respect of human rights at the national and international levels.** Austrian policies are guided by the conviction that human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Austria is further convinced that the promotion and protection of all human rights worldwide must be facilitated through partnership and dialogue with all relevant actors. The greatest challenges of our time – ranging from the protection of media freedom to the management of large movements of refugees and migrants – can only be overcome through effective multilateral mechanisms based on full respect for international law and in cooperation with the international human rights system.

Austria looks back on a history of **longstanding commitment to developing and strengthening international human rights protection within the United Nations framework.** Austria's activities within the international community have always been centred around its political neutrality and its extensive tradition of building bridges across cultural, ethnical, ideological and religious boundaries. In this spirit, Austria hosted the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 as well as several follow-up events. For its chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2017, Austria focused on the fight against radicalization and extremism, addressing crucial aspects such as freedom of religion and assembly, freedom of expression and safety of journalists, gender equality, protection of minorities, tackling hate speech as well as cybersecurity, with a view of advancing the discussion on these issues. Furthermore, Austria contributed proactively to the promotion of human rights within the United Nations as Chair of the 55<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission for Social Development of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and as Chair of the Committee on Information of the UN General Assembly in 2017, as well as in its role as facilitator of the negotiations for the political declaration of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

The Human Rights Council plays a leading role in developing and strengthening human rights protection worldwide. On this account, Austria has decided to announce its **candidacy for membership in the Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021.** Austria is proud to declare that it has essentially implemented the pledges and commitments related to its

candidacy for the Human Rights Council for 2011-2014. With a view of making the selection of members of the Human Rights Council as transparent as possible and in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251, Austria presents its new **pledges and commitments** as follows.

## **1. International Cooperation**

Austria is committed to **open, transparent and cross-regional international cooperation** and will continue to offer itself as a **place of dialogue and cooperation** for the promotion of human rights.

Austria has repeatedly demonstrated its dedication to the international human rights system and was a member of the Human Rights Council for the first time from 2011 to 2014. With its renewed membership in the Human Rights Council, Austria will intensify this commitment and **contribute to the full implementation of the mandate of the Human Rights Council**. Austria reaffirms its goal of rendering the work of the Human Rights Council more effective and supports efforts to **further strengthen the Human Rights Council** in a transparent manner and in collaboration with all member states.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of 1993 continue to be of immense importance for international human rights protection and served as a basis for the creation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Austria remains determined in its **support of an independent OHCHR** and will continue and intensify its ongoing engagement and support for the OHCHR.

Austria fully cooperates with all international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms and fulfils its periodic reporting obligations. It has extended a **general invitation to all special rapporteurs and other human rights mechanisms to visit Austria** and will continue to support their vital work and the work of the human rights treaty bodies. Austria places great emphasis on the universal periodic review (UPR). It is presently **implementing the recommendations adopted at the second UPR and will provide the Human Rights Council with an interim report thereon**. Akin to previous reviews, the review in the third UPR cycle will be prepared in a transparent procedure with the involvement of civil society.

In line with its long-standing tradition, Austria will continue to **build bridges** to develop and strengthen the international regime for the protection of human rights at the United Nations and other organizations. It will use its experience to openly and transparently promote **cross-regional cooperation** and to contribute to the understanding of the shared responsibility of members of the Human Rights Council to develop and strengthen international human rights protection. Recognizing the significant contribution of **civil society** to the promotion of human

rights and to the work of the human rights system of the United Nations, Austria will maintain its cooperation with and support for civil society on the national and international level. To this effect, Austria will also continue to oppose clearly reprisals against human rights defenders.

First and foremost, Austria will remain committed to its current human rights priorities. At the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, Austria will continue to support actively **initiatives to promote rights of minorities, freedom of speech and the safety of journalists, the human rights of internally displaced persons as well as human rights in the administration of justice.** Austria is determined to intensify cross-regional cooperation to further pursue these initiatives.

Austria will continue its cooperation to **strengthen the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities, the rule of law** and the promotion of **human rights education**, and to **fight against human trafficking, racism and discrimination.** The **global abolition of the death penalty** remains a priority of Austrian foreign policy.

One of the goals of the 2030 Agenda is the creation of peaceful and inclusive societies. This goal is at the heart of Austrian development cooperation, which supports its partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and South-Eastern and Eastern Europe in their sustainable social, economic and democratic development and in strengthening the rule of law. **Austrian development cooperation is committed to a human rights-based approach**, which is implemented as a guiding principle in its international programs and projects as well as in political dialogue, focusing on humanitarian aid, the fight against poverty, cooperation in the area of migration, gender equality and the rights of the child and of persons with disabilities. This is reflected through specific programs and projects for bilateral cooperation as well as in the support of institutions such as OHCHR, UNDP, UNODC, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN WOMEN. **Austria will continue and further strengthen these efforts.**

At the United Nations as well as in regional organizations such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Austria's human rights policy is founded on the **principles of partnership, objectivity and pluralism.** Austria's efforts are centred around **dialogue with all stakeholders** and aimed at a partnership-based solution of problems, with a view of overcoming differences, improving the protection of human rights worldwide and promoting positive change in people's lives. Within the European Union (EU), Austria advocates for a consistent human rights policy within and outside the Union.

Austria looks back on a long and successful tradition of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. In dialogue activities, great emphasis is placed on strengthening the role of women and the inclusion of young people. Highest priority is given to issues of social, cultural and religious pluralism, democracy building, and respect for human rights, including freedom of religion.

**Austria will continue and intensify its efforts to promote intercultural dialogue and freedom of religion.**

## **2. Austria's Commitment to the Protection of Human Rights**

Austria is committed to promoting a human rights policy that ensures the **respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights also at the national level**. It has ratified and implemented all major international human rights treaties. In Austria, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) holds the status of constitutional law and the actions of the state, its courts and its administrative authorities are directly guided by the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. Furthermore, the rights guaranteed by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are used to evaluate Austria's action on human rights within the scope of European Union law.

Ensuring and protecting human rights is also understood by Austria as a dynamic process, which, due to the ever-changing level of social awareness, must be constantly developed. The framework conditions created for the **integration of refugees and migrants** will be further improved inter alia through support and advice, including on fundamental and human rights. At the national level, Austria intends, inter alia, to take measures to expand the **legal protection of children**. Implementing Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)5 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Member States, the Austrian government has commissioned independent experts to engage with various stakeholder groups and review the country's record on **safeguarding Internet freedom**. The **National Action Plan on Disability (2012-2020) is being evaluated** and **will be continued** through 2021-2030 based on the results of this evaluation.

Through revision of the Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Corruption and development of a National Action Plan based on the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, Austria will **adapt and expand the measures to prevent and combat corruption** to current compliance standards.

In Austria, the courts – notably the Constitutional Court – ensure that constitutional rights are respected. **The role of the Constitutional Court will be further strengthened through the introduction of a mandatory preliminary ruling procedure before binding referenda** under the conditions set out in the Government Programme to ensure the compliance with fundamental rights as well as international and European Union law. The government is also committed to a further concretization of the rights arising from the constitutional guarantees to a fair trial. In addition, several independent supervisory bodies monitor the implementation of and respect for human rights at the national level.

The Austrian Ombudsman Board is the country's national human rights institution. It addresses grievances against administrative bodies, including alleged human rights violations. Since 2012,

it has also exercised preventive control over detention facilities, along with its six independent commissions. In the Austrian parliament, a committee on human rights routinely addresses current human rights issues. **Austria will evaluate its national security authorities and further develop them in accordance with international models.** Legal protection will be developed to the highest standards following the structural model of the Austrian Ombudsman Board.

Austria places particular emphasis on the **involvement of civil society** in the promotion of human rights. Consequently, the government and the authorities are engaged in continuous dialogue with civil society and value the engagement and technical expertise demonstrated by many civil society organizations. These organizations contribute substantially to the relevance of the work carried out by national and international human rights mechanisms.

In cooperation with national and international stakeholders, the Austrian National Contact Point for the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises will continue to pursue its activities in a proactive manner and with a strengthened focus on human rights and will continue to play a key role as a platform for dialogue and arbitration in connection with human rights issues related to **cross-border activities of Austrian companies.**