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Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Désirée SCHWEITZER

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and other International Organisations in Geneva*

G e n e r a l D e b a t e

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Austria aligns itself with the statements of the European Union, the Group of Friends of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and the Group of Friends of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness.

At the outset, let me add Austria's voice in condemning in the strongest possible terms the heinous terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel. The senseless violence has to cease immediately, hostages must be released, and civilians protected in line with international humanitarian law.

Let me also express our deep solidarity with the victims of the tragic earthquakes that happened in Afghanistan last Saturday and today.

On 10 December this year, we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was this ground-breaking document which first enshrined, in its Article 14, the right of every human being to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

High Commissioner,

We have listened attentively to your sobering account of the current situation of global forced displacement, which has passed the staggering number of 110 million people. It has been your merit to remind us that behind this number stand individuals with shattered lives and an uncertain future.

We thank all UNHCR staff in the field and at headquarters and, High Commissioner, your leadership for your tireless efforts to provide help and new hope to these people.

The world has become a fearful place for too many of our fellow human beings. We manifestly deplore that in an increasing number of countries, people are forced from their homes by excessive human rights violations, persisting political oppression, civil strife and outright war.

In this context, we condemn in the strongest terms the continued unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression committed by Russia against Ukraine, which has displaced more than 4.1 million persons into the European Union and Schengen area and more than 5 million persons internally.

We are deeply concerned by the massive forced displacement emerging from the ongoing armed violence in Sudan and the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel. In addition, we deplore the military operation against the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh and the ensuing mass exodus of ethnic Armenians.

We will not cease to call upon all parties to armed conflict globally to strictly abide by their obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. This includes the obligation to grant full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and guarantee the safety of humanitarian corridors and workers.

Madam Chair,

In order to place Austria's humanitarian response to the multiple crises the world is facing now on a solid strategic basis with concrete aims and responsibilities, we have elaborated the new "Strategy for the Humanitarian Assistance of Austria", which the Austrian Federal Government has adopted last Wednesday.

The Strategy highlights that refugees, IDPs and stateless persons count among the most vulnerable groups who are in need of adequate protection and care. It addresses that the main causes of migration, flight and displacement are armed conflicts, human rights violations and the consequences of the climate crisis.

Since the beginning of the legislative period in 2019, the Austrian government has quintupled our humanitarian budget to the amount of 77.5 million euros for the year 2023. In the last two years, UNHCR has been Austria's largest partner in the implementation of our humanitarian assistance.

In cooperation with UNHCR and other partners, Austria provides assistance where it is needed most – on the spot of crisis and disaster situations.

As our Humanitarian Strategy sets out, Austria, in responding to humanitarian crises, commits to enhance its focus on vulnerable groups, in particular women and girls, LGBTIQ+ persons and persons with disabilities.

Prevention of and combatting sexual and gender-based violence, medical care and active participation of women and girls must stay at the forefront of humanitarian measures. This includes access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The different perspectives of women and girls are essential, so that they do not merely receive assistance, but actively participate in shaping it. The same holds true for the specific protection and care needs of persons with disabilities.

Humanitarian assistance has to address the concerns of LGBTIQ+ persons following a human rights-based approach. In this context, Austria expresses its full support for UNHCR's work in protecting forcibly displaced and stateless LGBTIQ+ persons and the Office's age, gender and diversity policy.

Support to refugees, IDPs and their host communities has to be targeted and effective. To achieve this aim, strengthening protection and reception capacities in and near regions of origin, education and the creation of employment opportunities are essential.

The exposure to greater health risks of vulnerable, marginalised and discriminated groups has to be addressed by adequate health care measures.

Madam Chair,

Austria continues to be exposed to high pressure: In an EU comparison, Austria is the country with the second highest number of asylum applications per capita. Since 2015, more than 380,000 asylum applications have been filed in Austria.

In terms of granting protection, Austria ranks among the EU Member States with the highest rates as well. In 2023, asylum has been granted to more than 10,000 persons, subsidiary protection to more than 5,000 persons and humanitarian stay to more than 1,000 persons. In addition, 105,000 displaced persons from Ukraine have registered in Austria since the beginning of the war.

Being a party to both UN statelessness conventions and a member of the Group of Friends of the #IBelong campaign, Austria will continue to support all endeavours to end statelessness.

Austria looks forward to the upcoming second Global Refugee Forum this December as a welcomed opportunity to further mobilise global support for burden- and responsibility sharing for refugees and enhance support to ease the burden of refugee hosting countries.

Thank you very much.