

**UN Forum on Minority Issues
Third Session
Geneva, 14 – 15 December 2010**

**Statement by
Austria**

Mme President,

Since its establishment, supporting the Forum on Minority Issues has been a priority for Austria. This Forum provides a unique opportunity for dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities involving a wide range of stakeholders.

We applaud this year's focus on economic participation. In Austria, while our six autochthonous minority groups whose rights are safeguarded in our constitution are generally well integrated in the labor market, we are now nevertheless in the process of rethinking our approach to their economic integration. In the framework of the current reform of our national Minority Act, we have recently established a working group dealing with the economic participation of our national minorities.

Austria is discussing these reforms in the context of shifting demographic, social and cultural patterns. Taking these developments into account, it is evident that the traditional protection measures for minorities have to be integrated in regional development perspectives. In this context, preserving and fostering minority languages constitutes an important aspect. The enlargement of the European Union has on the one hand led to an economical revalorization of minority languages and has considerably affected the demand for studying them. However, at the same time we can observe a decrease in linguistic competences in daily life.

We need to better reflect the potential of multilingualism and intercultural competence of national minorities, which also includes strong ties to neighbouring countries and thus to neighbouring markets. In this context, I would like to stress that in recent years many companies and public institutions in Austria have realised the importance

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of intercultural competences and of diversity management which definitely favours minority groups.

In addition to a strong antidiscrimination policy based on equal opportunities, an effective regional and economic policy involving national minority members as well as members of the majority is needed in order to raise participation of national minorities in economic life. It is also important that civil society and in particular minority organisations participate actively in these programs and projects.

There are many different ways to raise the participation of minorities in economic life but there is only one common goal: the promotion and protection of persons belonging to minorities and their integration into society. We are encouraged by examples from other countries to this end.

Before I conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to express Austria's sincere appreciation to the Independent Expert for organizing and guiding the deliberations of this important event. In 2011 we will evaluate and review its work. We all have to ensure that the Forum remains the excellent gathering in the field of minority issues as it has been over the last 3 years. The 20th anniversary of the Declaration in 2012 is providing an additional opportunity for further strengthening not only our Forum, but also the impact of its recommendations in our societies.

Let me wish you all a good and constructive continuation of your deliberations and a good outcome of the meeting.

Thank you very much.