

**Fifth Session – United Nations Forum on Minority Issues**

“Implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: Identifying positive practices and opportunities”

Geneva, 27 – 28 November 2012

**Statement by Austria**

Mme Chair,

First of all, we would like to congratulate you for your appointment as chair of the Forum which is focusing this year on the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. As main sponsor of the resolutions on this issue in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, Austria is particularly proud and honored to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of this important document.

Adopted by consensus by the General Assembly in 1992, the Declaration is and remains the main international reference document for minority rights. The rights that are enshrined therein can only be guaranteed by the full and effective implementation of the provisions of the Declaration. Here, we are still facing many challenges. After 20 years of existence, the status of implementation is still not satisfactory and its provisions lack attention. Therefore, discussions and initiatives like the Forum on Minority Issues help to raise awareness about the existence of the Declaration and to further promote the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

In this context, we would like to express our appreciation for the work done by the OHCHR, including by organizing a series of workshops in different regions of the world celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In May this year, one of these workshops took place in Vienna focusing on the enhancement of the effectiveness of international, regional and national human rights mechanisms in protecting and promoting the rights of religious minorities. We believe that joining forces on such events clearly demonstrates our commitment for the full and effective participation of the Declaration.

Austria hopes that today's discussion will facilitate our work and will also inform on possible avenues which could be undertaken to integrate more effectively the rights of persons belonging to minorities in the work of the Human Rights Council and its

mechanisms. In this regard, we would be interested to hear views from the panelists, the experts and other delegations on how the Council could best use the outcome of the Forum's discussions as well as of other events related to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Mme Chair,

Austria will continue its commitment to the mechanisms established to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including the mandate of the Independent Expert as well the Forum on Minority Issues. In particular the Forum which is a unique platform within the United Nations for promoting dialogue and cooperation on this issue has contributed to the enhanced visibility of minority rights.

Finally, we would like to draw attention to a side event organized jointly by the NGO Minority Rights Group International and Austria on the effective participation of religious minorities in public and political life. It will take place today at 1pm in room XXII.

I thank you for your attention.