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Statement by

Her Excellency Ursula Plassnik

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Austria

at the

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New York, 20 September 2005

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,

We Austrians unfailingly keep the United Nations in high esteem. Let me try and explain.

Austria became a member of the United Nations in December 1955. This was only half a year after our full sovereignty had been restored through a treaty concluded with the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and France, the "Austrian State Treaty".

Fifty years ago, becoming part of the family of nations was a powerful motive for us. We could build on your trust. We could rely on your help. We later solved complex problems such as the question of Südtirol with you, our partners in the United Nations. And we have since been eager to return the help extended to us to others in need.

More than anything else, it is our own experience that nurtures our confidence in the United Nations' potential: As a promoter of peace. As a beacon of hope for so many who face the dire challenges and threats to our societies – be it armed conflict or hunger, terrorism or environmental disaster.

We need the United Nations to be relevant, responsive and reliable – today and in the years to come.

The reform process initiated by Secretary General Kofi Annan and reflected in the World Summit Outcome document will further enhance this potential. We may not have achieved all we were striving for. But let us not disregard the progress we have made. For it will – if acted upon – make a difference to people in need of our support, in need of our protection.

Mr. President,

Promoting peace is the United Nations' very "raison d'être". Since Austria joined the United Nations, some 54.000 Austrian peace-keepers have participated in more than 50 missions all over the world. Currently, 1.200 of them are deployed in missions from Kosovo to the Golan Heights and from Afghanistan to Aceh and Sudan.

It is also in the light of their practical experience that we welcome the new Peacebuilding Commission. It will provide specific support to people having to cope with the manifold challenges along the path from war to lasting peace.

One word on women in that context: Creating confidence in post-conflict societies requires the active participation and deliberate involvement of women. They must become key partners in our peace-keeping and peace-building efforts.

The European Union, as the major donor to post-conflict reconstruction and development, will substantially contribute to the Peacebuilding Commission's work. It should therefore have a place in the Commission.

For us and many people all over the world the most serious failure of the present reform effort was the lack of agreement on effective and verifiable measures against nuclear proliferation and for disarmament. We must strengthen the multilateral verification mechanisms and permit the International Atomic Energy Agency to make best use of its capacity. We must not abandon our efforts to find common ground on these most challenging tasks.

Mr. President,

In this vulnerable world, we need to foster trust between communities and peoples and help to identify shared values. Austria thus strongly supports every form of dialogue among civilisations, religions and cultures. In particular, we need to reach out to the Islamic world, both internationally and inside our societies.

As a concrete contribution, Austria will host an international conference on "Islam in a Pluralistic World" in November.

Anywhere in the world, individuals will only be able to live and unfold in larger freedom when their fundamental needs of development, security and human rights are met. We need to address these requirements in a comprehensive and integrated manner. We are grateful to Secretary General Kofi Annan who so remarkably raised awareness on this matter.

The Millennium Development Goals contain specific promises of solidarity. Austria welcomes our continued common commitments, in particular, to poverty eradication and a global partnership for sustainable development. In contributing to the funding effort, we will raise our official development assistance to 0.51 percent of the gross national income by 2010.

Promoting human security is an ever more demanding task. Our decisions on the "responsibility to protect" are a courageous step forward in international relations. But more importantly: They are an offer of hope to those most vulnerable through genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. We must not let them down. For, in the words of Simon Wiesenthal who sadly passed away last night, what connects 2000 years of genocide is "too much power in too few hands".

Ten years ago, at this Assembly, Simon Wiesenthal proposed to organize a worldwide conference aimed at reducing hate. "Technology without hate can be so beneficial for mankind, but in conjunction with hatred it leads to disaster." Reality has since illustrated the profound relevance of this proposal.

Mr. President,

In our globalized world, the concept of "neighbourhood" has taken on a new meaning: In the eye of disaster, we are all neighbours, no matter how far or close. As the tsunami and recent hurricanes taught us, there is an emerging sense of shared destiny and responsibility no longer limited to geographical vicinity. Let me express our gratitude to all those private donors who set a mark of living solidarity.

Austria's clear commitment to effective multilateralism is at the heart of our work in the European Union and the United Nations. It is in this spirit that we are a candidate for the Security Council in 2009/2010.

Mr. President,

Promoting the rule of law is the key for an environment of trust within our societies. It enables individuals to a self-determined life. For many, the rule of law is synonymous to normality and predictability for their private and professional lives. We therefore welcome the proposed establishment of a "Rule of Law Assistance Unit" in the Secretariat to advise states in their efforts towards the rule of law.

The decision to establish a Human Rights Council is one of the main achievements of the Summit, even as the concrete set-up remains to be defined. In our view, we need a standing body with the ability to address urgent human rights issues swiftly and efficiently. This is not a mere management question. What is at stake is the new Council's capacity to make a difference for those in need. It is crucial that negotiations start without delay in order to seize the momentum of the reform.

Human Rights are also a matter of education. In the framework of the Human Security Network, Austria has therefore developed a "Human Rights Manual" that has been translated into all United Nations languages. It is used in training programmes in Austria and abroad and we encourage our partners to make use of this instrument.

Strengthening human rights and the rule of law will increase security. This is true for societies at large. But it is also true for the smallest communities and individual households. Full respect for the rights of women and children is indispensable in the world of increased justice and equality we strive for.

Too many women are victims of violence. We therefore welcome the study currently being prepared by the Secretary General on all forms of violence against women.

Mr. President,

Much remains to be done. The Doha Development Round has to promote improved access to markets for all. In our efforts to protect the environment we have to enhance the use of renewable energy and reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. We need to finalise the comprehensive anti-terrorism convention, as agreed at the World Summit, and adopt and implement the counter-terrorism strategy proposed by the Secretary General.

Real freedom is within reach if we, through the United Nations, join our forces to promote peace, security and justice.

Not only freedom from want and freedom from fear, but eventually freedom to live in dignity for both women and men across the globe.