

**Statement by the
Federal President of the Republic of Austria,
H.E. Dr. Heinz Fischer**

High Level Side Event

30th September, 2015

“Strengthening cooperation on migration and refugee movements in the
perspective of the new development agenda”

Check against delivery!

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful to the Secretary-General for convening today's meeting.

A few days ago we adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for "orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration". The current refugee and migration crisis shows that we have a long way to go to achieve this goal.

As you know, the European Union and many other countries are facing an extraordinary challenge caused by the sudden and enormous increase of refugees and migrants coming via the Balkans and the Southern Mediterranean Route. The majority is fleeing the war in Syria and the atrocities committed by ISIS in the region. Since the beginning of this year hundreds of thousands of people have made their way to Europe.

A number of European countries are particularly affected by this dramatic situation.

As for Austria, with a population of 8 million, let me give you a few numbers:

In 2014 28.000 refugees applied for asylum in Austria,

For 2015, we are expecting 80.000 or more. This is the second highest per capita rate among the 28 EU member states – and similar to Germany's.

Thousands of persons have been crossing the border into Austria on a daily basis, sometimes up to 20.000. Most of them want to go to Germany, but more and more are staying in Austria.

Behind these numbers stand the individual and often traumatic fates of children, women and men, of families torn apart, of survivors of terrible circumstances and dangerous flight routes.

There are several challenges for us:

1. First of all, receiving and treating these refugees in a humane manner.

I think Austria has done that in an exemplary way. Austria has been providing food, water, shelter, medical support and other basic supplies to the arriving refugees for many weeks.

In this context, I want to highlight the immediate and enormous contribution by civil society to our professional support structures. Without their sustained support Austria would not be able to cope with this sudden influx of people in the dignified way it is. I have visited reception centres and train stations – and was deeply impressed by the untiring work both of our professional support structures, as well as the many volunteers who coordinate resources - often via social media - to optimise the organisation of support to the arriving refugees.

But the current situation is not tenable.

2. We have to manage these refugee flows in a common approach and to share responsibility at the international level.

Austria supports the recent decisions taken at the European Union level in this regard. We need to work towards an effective common asylum and migration policy, with the joint administration of hot spots at most affected entry points, and with a just, quota-based distribution of refugees among EU member countries. Asylum is an inalienable right, but it does not include the right to pick and choose one's country of asylum.

Furthermore, the European Union has to and will step up cooperation with all transit countries along the Balkans route. And, most importantly, with those countries that have been shouldering the brunt of the burden of the effects of the war in Syria for the past years, by hosting millions of refugees: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan.

Furthermore, there needs to be a much stronger international effort to step up support for these countries, in cooperation with UNHCR, IOM and other organisations.

Finally and most importantly, the atrocious war in Syria, already lasting longer than World War One, needs to be stopped.

The blockage in the Security Council over the last four and a half years on Syria has to be ended. This is not only a political, it is also a moral responsibility. We need substantial political progress, we need to avoid another 250.000 dead Syrians, and millions more displaced persons and refugees.

This must be the highest priority, even if it means putting aside certain preconditions that have been blocking progress for so long.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is what we need to do, and we can do it, if we act together.