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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

High-Level International UN Conference on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two- State Solution.

Statement by

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Co-Chairs,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to the Co-Chairs, France and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for the convening of this High-Level Conference.

Austria remains firmly committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East— a peace in which two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace and security, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

But we are not here to merely reaffirm long-held positions. We are here to support concrete progress — for real steps toward the implementation of the two-State solution.

Sadly, the already distant prospects for a lasting peace have moved even further out of reach ever since the horrendous terror attack by Hamas on 7 October.

- **As a first and crucial step** towards resuming a credible **peace process, the war in Gaza must end now. To this end**, Austria calls for an immediate ceasefire in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2735 leading to a permanent end of hostilities.
- Hamas must unconditionally release all remaining hostages with dignity. Taking them was a crime that should never have been committed.
- At the same time, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is nothing less than apocalyptic. Too many civilians, too many children have lost their lives senselessly. The suffering of the civilian population must stop. Abiding by international humanitarian law is not optional.
- In an effort to alleviate the dire crisis, Austria has provided over 67 million euros in humanitarian aid to Gaza and the conflict-ridden region since hostilities began.

- We welcome the understanding reached between the EU and Israel to significantly improve the supply and distribution of aid and call for its full and swift implementation. Moreover, the United Nations and the ICRC must be fully involved in the distribution of aid. A mechanism that does not comply with the humanitarian principles and puts vulnerable people at risk defies its own purpose. The reported killing of over 1.000 Palestinians seeking aid, is horrifying and unacceptable.
- Stabilising both the security and humanitarian situations is a prerequisite for a second phase, the medium-term perspective.

This second step is the reconstruction effort and economic support

- For us, it is clear: Gaza is and will remain Palestinian. Any calls for displacement or annexation of Palestinian land are illegal and will only lead to more chaos and violence in the region.
- But the most difficult question remains: how can a pragmatic and realistic governance arrangement be ensured for Gaza under the Palestinian Authority, in which Hamas plays no role and is fully disarmed, posing no threat to Israel?
- Austria welcomes the initiative of the Arab countries to present a plan for the reconstruction of Gaza. We will continue to support this plan and stand ready to contribute to its financing when the time comes for its implementation.
- Austria, also via the European Union, will continue to support the Palestinian Authority to help it address its most pressing needs, build institutional capacities, and implement its reform agenda. A strong PA is also in the interest of Israel. Therefore, we call on Israel to release the legitimate funds of the Palestinian Authority.

Finally, on the long-term perspectives for a Two-State Solution

- While this conference is an important contribution, a negotiated solution remains the only sustainable path that is in the interest of both parties.

Austria therefore calls for the swift resumption of credible negotiations between the parties.

- Austria continues to support the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of a democratic, viable, and contiguous Palestinian state. In this regard, Austria will not recognize any changes to the 1967 borders unless agreed by the parties.
- Austria rejects any unilateral attempts to undermine the prospects for a two-state solution. The expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories is a clear violation of international law and an obstacle to peace. We demand that Israel halts all construction of additional settlements.
- The legitimate security concerns of Israel must represent a key consideration of any process leading to a Two-State Solution. All actors in the region must clearly reject terrorism.

Excellencies,

Austria's commitment to peace is unwavering.

The international community has a clear role to play: to enable, to support, and to hold all parties accountable.

You can count on Austria to continue to stand on the side of peace.

I thank you.