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PERMANENT MISSION OF AUSTRIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement

by

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to the United Nations

at the 57th Session of the Commission on the

Status of Women

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Madame Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Austria fully aligns herself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Ireland on behalf of the European Union. It is a privilege and honour for me to address the high level plenary of the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

We strongly welcome the fact that this year's session is dedicated to the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. Although violence against women and girls has been recognized as a particularly grave form of discrimination and a human rights violation, it continues to be a universal phenomenon.

States have the obligation to take appropriate measures to protect women and girls from violence and to prevent and prosecute all of its manifestations.

The elimination and prevention of violence against women - both domestically as well as in the international sphere –is therefore a **major concern** of the Austrian federal government.

At the national level, Austria pursues a comprehensive approach to tackling this important issue, which focuses particularly on the protection against domestic violence, prosecution, improvement of victims' rights, support to victims as well as preventive and awareness-raising measures. **Non-governmental organisations** have made a decisive contribution in this regard and play an essential role in providing assistance to victims.

Let me now elaborate on some of the legislative changes Austria has introduced over the past years in order to effectively protect victims of domestic violence: The so-called **Protection Against Violence Act** entered into force in 1997 and has been amended several times since then. It entitles the police to evict perpetrators of

domestic violence from the home shared with the victim and to prevent them from returning. This law makes it clear that domestic violence is not a private matter.

As an important measure supporting the Protection Against Violence Act, **specialised facilities for the protection of victims, so-called "intervention centres" or "violence protection centres"** (some of them with regional branches) were set up in all the federal provinces of Austria. Once a perpetrator has been evicted by the police from the home, these centres will contact the victim and offer comprehensive assistance; the ultimate objective is, of course, to guarantee the victim's safety.

In order to take into consideration the specific circumstances of domestic violence, **the Austrian Penal Code was amended** in 2009 to recognize prolonged infliction of violence, which often occurs in the context of domestic violence, as a crime under Austrian law.

In the past few years, efforts to raise the awareness of medical staff have been intensified to help them recognise and provide professional assistance to victims of domestic violence. A legal obligation was introduced to establish **victim protection groups** for persons affected by domestic violence, in particular in larger hospitals.

In 2006 the **Anti-Stalking Act** was adopted. On the one hand, it allows prosecution for stalking acts under criminal law; on the other hand it strengthens measures under civil law forcing the perpetrator to refrain from committing specific acts. The victims are supported by intervention centres/violence protection centres also in these cases.

In addition to legislative reforms, Austria is continuously working to improve and support other measures to combat violence against women. Concerning violence based on harmful traditional practices we have to take a clear stand. Tradition, religion, belief, cultural customs or practices must never be used to justify violations of women's rights. Measures and services tailored to suit the needs of victims of

harmful traditional practices are indispensable. Austria supports international efforts in this regard,

Ten years ago the *Austrian Platform Against Female Genital Mutilation* (*Österreichische Plattform gegen weibliche Genitalverstümmelung*) was founded to raise awareness for **FGM** and to support measures to combat it.

As far as victims of forced marriage are concerned, we are in the process of setting up an emergency accommodation and counseling centre for girls and young women threatened or affected by **forced marriage**, which will offer comprehensive (24-hour) assistance.

In another specific area of violence affecting particularly women and girls - **trafficking in human beings** - an inter-ministerial task force was established in 2004 to coordinate measures against trafficking in human beings. In the meantime the task force has developed three National Action Plans Against Trafficking in Human Beings.

Moreover, a specialised institution for the protection of victims of Trafficking in Women has been in place in Austria for about 15 years. Strong emphasis has also been placed on technical cooperation with Austria's neighbouring countries. The aim is to combat effectively all forms of trafficking in women in Austria and nine neighbouring countries. Austria also supports efforts to combat trafficking in persons at the international level: it has contributed to the Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking, managed by UNODC, and is honored to have been appointed co-facilitator for the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons on May 13th this year.

At the international level, Austria has been a long-standing supporter of the Secretary-General's campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women and the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women. Austria is strongly committed to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions, which aim at the protection of women from violence in conflict situations, at ending impunity and at promoting the participation of

women in peace processes. The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women furthermore is one of the priority areas of the Austrian Development Cooperation. In this context, particular attention is given to the prevention of violence. Therefore, the Austrian Development Cooperation is funding a number of projects in partner countries giving support to female victims of domestic violence.

Madame Chair,

Let me conclude by reaffirming that **women's rights are human rights**. While this has been established clearly at the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 20 years ago, much remains to be done. We need to persist in our joint efforts to promote gender equality and to ensure protection against violence. This Commission can make an important contribution to that end and we are ready to join hands and work for a forward-looking and action-oriented outcome of this session.

Thank you for your attention!