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*Statement by*

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**G e n e r a l   D e b a t e**

Thank you, Mister Chair,

At the beginning, let me express Austria's sincere appreciation for the dedicated work of IOM staff in the field and at headquarters, as well as for the excellent leadership of the Director-General.

Austria aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

We are very happy to welcome Barbados as new member state of IOM.

Director-General,

Austria values the role of IOM as key partner in international migration management worldwide. Furthermore, we highly appreciate the great bilateral cooperation with your organisation in the context of a multitude of joint projects. We are proud to host and substantially support IOM's Regional Office for Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia as well as the Country Office for Austria in Vienna.

In 2022, Austria has supported IOM's operations in particular in the areas of migration management, assisted voluntary return and reintegration, combatting migrant smuggling and human trafficking, information campaigns, and improvement of living conditions of asylum applicants through health care provision.

Mister Chair,

Austria condemns, in the strongest possible terms, Russia's unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which has caused the largest and fastest-growing movement of forcibly displaced persons in Europe since World War II.

We commend IOM for its fast and comprehensive assistance to IDPs within Ukraine as well as to Ukrainian refugees in EU Member States, who benefit from temporary protection. Austria

is and will remain engaged in IOM projects supporting displaced persons from Ukraine in Hungary, Moldova and Romania as well as voluntary transfers, mostly of vulnerable persons, from Moldova and Poland to Austria.

Mister Chair,

At this moment, Austria is facing a severe migration crisis. In 2022, we received nearly 90,000 asylum applications so far, which corresponds to a rise of nearly 250 per cent compared to last year. This constitutes the second highest number of asylum applications per capita in the whole EU, and has resulted in huge pressure for our reception and basic care capacities as well as our asylum system.

The Austrian Federal Government is investing considerably in measures to foster integration and inclusion of refugees. Still, there is also a large number of migrants arriving in Austria without need for protection.

In view of a comprehensive and credible migration policy, including the need to return irregular migrants, who do not qualify for asylum, IOM is an important partner in supporting member states to develop and offer sustainable solutions, in particular via its assisted voluntary return and reintegration programs.

Mister Chair,

The new Three-Year Programme of the Austrian Development Cooperation Policy 2022–2024 adopted earlier this month places a particular focus on migration and forced displacement.

The Programme contains measures aimed towards opening up sustainable perspectives and opportunities by promoting better political, economic and social conditions in countries of origin. Austria will continue to support assistance on site, especially in neighbouring countries of crisis regions, to enable forcibly displaced persons to return after the end of a crisis.

Within Austria, recent amendments to the Employment of Foreign Nationals Act and the Residence and Stay Act further facilitate regular migration: The access of regular seasonal workers in the sectors of tourism, agriculture and forestry has been exempted from quotas and individual labour market examinations.

The new legislation has abolished the annual maximum number of temporarily employed foreign seasonal and harvest workers. It eases the previously strict linking of qualifications and professional experience, determines the minimum wage for keyworkers irrespective of age, eliminates the minimum wage for university graduates, and streamlines the admission procedure.

In previous years, Austria also has significantly increased its financial humanitarian assistance, which in 2022 so far totals more than 100 million USD. This year, we have allocated funds to IOM's humanitarian work in the amount of 5.4 million euros in addition to our regular unearmarked and earmarked contributions to IOM. As in previous years, Austria has also contributed to the IOM Development Fund through unearmarked contributions.

We thank the Director-General for his excellent stewardship and tireless efforts, which contributed to IOM's continuing growth during the last years. IOM as the leading UN agency on migration can count on Austria's continued steadfast support.

Thank you very much.