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Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Désirée SCHWEITZER

*Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations
and other International Organisations in Geneva*

G e n e r a l D e b a t e

Thank you, Madam Chair,

At the beginning, let me cordially congratulate you, Director-General, on your election and assumption of office as the first woman at the helm of IOM. We wish you all success in this responsible function!

Furthermore, let me thank all IOM staff in the field and at headquarters for their dedicated commitment and hard work in often difficult and dangerous operating environments.

Austria aligns itself with the statement by the European Union and the Joint Statement to be delivered by Ukraine.

We condemn, in the strongest terms, Russia's unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, and the brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks by Hamas across Israel. We are deeply concerned about the continued escalation of the conflict in Sudan. We deplore the loss of all civilian lives and reiterate the obligation of all parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances.

We believe that no country can address migration on its own. Austria continues to pursue a comprehensive approach to migration. This includes addressing the challenges and root causes of irregular migration, building effective, sustainable and tailor-made partnerships as well as strengthening the synergies between humanitarian, development and peace actors.

Our approach relies on close cooperation with countries of origin, transit and destination as well as other partners, with IOM at the forefront.

The migration landscape continues to evolve and the situation remains volatile. In order to place Austria's humanitarian response to the multiple crises the world is facing on a solid strategic basis, with concrete aims and responsibilities, we have elaborated the new "Austrian

Strategy on Humanitarian Assistance”, which the Austrian Federal Government has adopted last month.

The Strategy stresses that the main causes of migration, flight and displacement are armed conflicts, human rights violations and the consequences of the climate crisis. It highlights that refugees and IDPs count among the most vulnerable groups in need of adequate protection and care.

Due to climate change, extreme weather events such as floods, hurricanes and droughts are becoming more and more frequent and increasing in intensity. Climate change, disasters, limited resources and hunger are drivers of conflict and displacement.

In crisis and disaster situations, Austria provides humanitarian assistance where it is needed most – on the ground. Since the beginning of the current legislative period in 2019, the Austrian government has quintupled the budget of our main humanitarian instrument to the amount of 77.5 million euros for the year 2023, with a further increase to 80 million euros set for 2024.

As the Strategy sets out, Austria, in responding to humanitarian crises, commits to enhance its focus on vulnerable groups, in particular women and girls, LGBTIQ+ persons and persons with disabilities.

Austria values the role of IOM as key partner in international migration management worldwide. We appreciate the great bilateral cooperation with your organisation in the context of a multitude of joint projects.

In 2023, 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 migrants in transit countries through accommodation and health care provision.

We also responded to the IOM Appeal for Tunisia and, as in previous years, contributed to the IOM Development Fund. Furthermore, it is a privilege for me to announce that Austria has recently taken the decision to support an IOM project in Libya with 2 million Euros.

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.

Austria will continue to support IOM as the lead UN agency on migration. In view of ever-changing challenges, we look forward to work with IOM on fit-for-purpose responses and swift reaction to the altering developments in the area of migration.

Thank you very much.