

**FEATURED ADDRESS TO THE 39th INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE
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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to address this year's Vienna Seminar on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping, organized by the International Peace Institute, the National Defence Academy and the Vienna Diplomatic Academy, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Defence and my Ministry. I would like to thank you all for participating in this important seminar.

The topic of this year's Vienna Seminar is very timely: The question of how to implement and operationalize the concept of the "Responsibility to Protect" is high on the agenda of the United Nations.

The promotion of the rule of law and the protection of civilians have long been a focus of Austria's work in the United Nations and have been guiding our work on the UN Security Council since the beginning of our membership. In most conflicts on the agenda of the Council, the civilian population bears the main burden; in particular women and children are often targeted and subject to horrifying abuse.

The main aim of the "Responsibility to Protect" is to protect civilian populations from future genocides and mass atrocities. Austria has been a strong advocate for the inclusion of the "Responsibility to Protect" in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document. The recent report of the Secretary-General provides a very clear framework for its implementation. Let me take the opportunity to thank the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, Dr. Ed Luck, present here today, for all his work on this important report. Austria is looking forward to its discussion in the General Assembly.

At the heart of the concept of "Responsibility to Protect" is the clear understanding that the sovereignty of states implies important responsibilities, in particular the responsibility of each state to protect its own population from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The primary responsibility for the implementation of the "Responsibility to Protect" rests with individual states. The international community has a supplemental role: to assist states to live up to their responsibility, including through support to strengthening their own protection capacity. It is only in case of manifest failure of a state to protect its population from the perpetration of these core crimes that the international community has the responsibility to take appropriate collective measures in accordance with the UN Charter. For Austria, it is important that in the implementation of the "Responsibility to Protect" particular attention is given to preventing situations from escalating, through early warning and capacity building.

The key challenge is that States and the international community live up to their obligations under “Responsibility to Protect”. The Secretary-General’s report sets out the tools available to the international community to assist states in this regard. But also the Security Council as the principle UN body for the maintenance of international peace and security has an important role to play. The focus must be on saving lives through timely and decisive actions taken at national, regional and international level.

Many argued that the recent developments in Sri Lanka constituted a case of “Responsibility to Protect”. In light of the serious implications for the civilian population, Austria, together with partners, has advocated for the Security Council to address the humanitarian situation there. As a result, the Council held several informal meetings on the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. Together with my colleagues from the United Kingdom and France, I participated personally in a meeting with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and key NGOs on 11 May. Austria’s primary concerns in seeking the Council’s involvement were the protection of the civilian population; the need for compliance with international humanitarian law and the unhindered access for humanitarian organizations. These issues were also reflected in a press statement of the Council.

Closely related to “Responsibility to Protect” is the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Through several resolutions and presidential statements the Council has set up a comprehensive protection agenda with clear obligations of parties to conflict, a toolbox for Security Council action and guidance for peace-keeping and other political missions. This includes the compliance by parties to conflict with their obligations under international humanitarian law; unhindered access for humanitarian organizations to people in need, as well as accountability for serious violations against civilians.

The protection of civilians is an Austrian key priority. During our membership on the Security Council, we therefore aim:

1. First, to contribute to the strengthening and further development of the Council’s protection agenda.
2. And second, to ensure that systematic attention to protection concerns is given in the daily deliberations of the Council. In this respect Austria welcomes the new informal expert group of the Council, which allows members of the Council to receive detailed information from humanitarian, human rights and other experts before the establishment or renewal of peacekeeping mandates.

I would like to use this opportunity to commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its excellent work – as well as many other actors within the UN system who are working hard for the protection of civilians – some of whom are present here today.

Important progress has been made in recent years, for example with the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on serious child rights violations to protect children affected by armed conflict. Currently Austria is working with others to expand

this mechanism beyond the recruitment of child soldiers to include also other serious violations, in particular sexual and gender based violence.

Some progress has also been made to protect women and to better include them in peace processes. Resolution 1820 addresses the widespread sexual violence against women. The forthcoming report of the Secretary-General will address the questions of accountability and of assistance to survivors of such abuses.

At the same time, we are faced with several challenges in making the protection of civilians a reality on the ground. Let me mention two points to which I attach particular importance.

1. One is the question how to ensure better compliance of parties to conflict with international humanitarian law. This is a particular problem with many non-state actors. The debate on this issue held by the Security Council in January raised important issues on how to strengthen the universal legal framework, how to prevent violations, and how to ensure accountability by perpetrators. Austria will continue to work with others to strengthen the role of the Security Council in this regard.
2. Another challenge is how to enhance the protection of civilians through peace-keeping operations. In recent years, several peace-keeping missions – such as the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo – have been mandated by the Council to ensure the physical protection of the civilian population. Its role to provide protection to refugees and internally displaced persons was a strong factor in Austria's decision to contribute troops to the EUFOR/Chad and MINURCAT. Austria has also contributed to the UN Study to analyse the experiences so far in the implementation of such protection mandates in peace operations. It is my hope that this will contribute to the overall reform efforts of UN peacekeeping. Our aim must be to have more effective and better resourced peacekeeping missions which are in a position to implement their protection mandates in a credible and consistent manner.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Security Council's first consideration of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. This anniversary provides us with a good opportunity to take stock and to reaffirm our commitment to protect civilians from the devastating effects of armed conflict.

We are therefore planning to organise an open debate of the Council on the occasion of the 10th anniversary in November. It is my intention to chair this important meeting personally and I hope that other colleagues on the Council will join. In this debate we will strive to identify concrete measures for addressing the current challenges in the protection of civilians and, thus, set the agenda for the coming years.

Let me conclude by welcoming you again here in Vienna. This Seminar is an important opportunity to discuss among experts and practitioners the many issues and challenges related to the "Responsibility to Protect" and to the protection of civilians. I am convinced that it will help us to identify concrete proposals and recommendations for

further strengthening the protection agenda of the Security Council. Thank you all for your commitment to this important cause.



Federal Minister for European and International Affairs Michael Spindelegger