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### Statement by H.E. Mr. Wolfgang Waldner, State Secretary for European and International Affairs of Austria

#### Informal High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on „The Role of Member States in Mediation“, New York, 23 May 2012

##### *Check against delivery!*

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organising today's high level meeting on the role of Member States in mediation and your personal commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes.

We fully concur with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's assessment that prevention is better and cheaper than cure. Mediation is a key element in preventive diplomacy as well as a valuable tool for conflict management and resolution. Recent developments show how successful consequent and sustainable mediation efforts can be. The progress made in Sierra Leone, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, and particularly Myanmar gives proof to this.

I could experience myself how positively the steps taken by the Government of Myanmar towards democracy were assessed by all participants at the recent EU-ASEAN Ministerial in Brunei in April. This also shows the validity and value of mediation as one of the tools to promote peaceful transitions.

It is also proof of the crucial role of the Secretary-General in providing good offices based on his mandate in the UN Charter and his impartiality. The appointment of Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan to resolve the crisis in Syria is an important example of a combined UN-Arab League mediation process. Although we are highly concerned by the situation on the ground, which is far from implementation of the six-point plan, we strongly believe there is no alternative to a political and negotiated solution.

Mr. President,

At this stage, one might ask: What can a small and medium-sized country like Austria contribute to mediation initiatives of the international community?

Since regaining its full independence in 1955, Austria has made it one of its foreign policy priorities to fully support the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security. Besides becoming a long-standing and most reliable troop contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and a UN headquarters, Austria also has always been seeking to support or undertake mediation initiatives.

As a neutral country and honest broker without vested interests Austria provided good offices from the Middle East in the 1970s and 80s to the All-Inclusive Intra East-Timorese Dialogue (AIETD) in the 1990s and most recently in the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. Austria offered Khartoum and Juba an impartial platform to meet. However, the recent escalation of the conflict underlines the necessity to immediately continue and strengthen mediation efforts. In this context, I would like to stress the importance of regional and local ownership and involvement in the search for lasting and sustainable solutions. The unwavering commitment of the African Union and its chief mediator Thabo Mbeki is decisive in this phase.

During our most recent membership in the UN Security Council in the years 2009 and 2010 Austria considered mediation a key tool to address crisis and conflict situations. Therefore, Austria supported the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, in his endeavours to promote genuine negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario. Informal talks between the parties were held in Dürnstein, Austria, in 2009. Since then, we have repeatedly offered to fulfil our role as a platform for dialogue and peace.

Moreover, we are working for peace and stability in the Balkans. As the negotiations which led to the establishment of the

International Civilian Office (ICO) in Kosovo took place in Vienna, we hosted the previous and will host the forthcoming meeting (July 2) of the ICO's International Steering Group (ISG) in Vienna as well.

Our efforts to promote the dialogue between cultures and religions for building peaceful, pluralistic and inclusive societies are another element of preventive diplomacy. We look forward to hosting the 5<sup>th</sup> UN Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Vienna in February 2013. Together with Saudi-Arabia and Spain, Austria founded the International King Abdullah Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue with its seat in Vienna which should provide a permanent platform for exchange and dialogue between the major religious communities.

Mr. President,

As a member of the European Union we believe that High Representative Catherine Ashton and her team of Special Representatives can play a prominent role in preventive diplomacy and mediation. The participation of the EU in the Middle East Quartet as well as in the talks with Iran shows the added value of an institution speaking on behalf of 27 Member States.

However, there are more regional efforts to be considered in this context. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) established formats for mediation including the Minsk-Group, the 5+2 Meeting on the Transnistria conflict as well as the OSCE role in the Geneva talks and the Community Security Initiative in Kyrgyzstan. As a concrete contribution, Austria provided premises in Vienna for the most recent round of the 5+2 Transnistria settlement talks, where substantial progress was reached, and will do the same for the next round scheduled for mid-July.

To conclude, I would like to thank Finland and Turkey for their initiative to work out a General Assembly resolution on strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution. The encouragement to promote equal, full and effective participation of women at all levels of conflict prevention and resolution reflects an Austrian priority. We therefore commend the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Department of Political Affairs to increase the percentage of female mediation experts and welcome the appointment of the first senior female mediator in Malawi.

Mr. President,

Mediation is a most effective and efficient way of dealing with crisis situations and preventing further escalation. We therefore call upon the Secretary-General and the wider UN family to help further develop this tool and to make even better use of it.

Thank you.