Vienna+20: Advancing the Protection of Human Rights
Achievements, Challenges and Perspectives 20 Years after the World Conference

International Conference on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna Hofburg, 27-28 June 2013)

In 2013, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights which took place from 14 to 25 June 1993 in Vienna, Austria. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA) adopted at the World Conference is a landmark document for the promotion and protection of human rights: among others, the universality of all human rights was affirmed, the realisation of human rights as a priority objective of the United Nations and a legitimate concern of the international community confirmed, the significance of the human rights of women highlighted, and, as a result, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and her office (OHCHR) were created.

The Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, in cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights (BIM) and the European Training and Research Centre for Democracy and Human Rights of the University of Graz (UNI-ETC), is organising a High Level Expert Conference in Vienna to examine how the achievements of the VDPA can best be used today to strengthen further the international human rights system.

Since 1993, significant progress has been made in the realisation of the provisions laid down in the VDPA. The Conference shall pinpoint current challenges and present best practices in the promotion and protection of human rights at the national, regional and international level. The Conference will invite all stakeholders, in particular UN, regional and civil society actors, to give their perspective. Based on their analysis, practical recommendations shall be developed to encourage States and other stakeholders to pursue further legal, institutional and practical improvements of human rights protection, both domestically and internationally. The Chair’s summary of the Conference along with its recommendations will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly in autumn of 2013.

Participants: The Expert Conference will gather approximately 100 participants: high level personalities representing OHCHR and other UN institutions; regional/sub-regional/national human rights institutions; personalities in the field of human rights, particularly women’s rights; human rights defenders; independent human rights experts from civil society and academia; government representatives. The Conference will also benefit from the contribution of UN Human Rights Council special procedures mandate holders and treaty bodies.

Programme Overview:

- **Day 1**
  - **Morning:**
    - Opening “Vienna+20: Achievements, Challenges and Perspectives“
    - Panel Discussion “The Legacy of the World Conference on Human Rights”
    - Expert Panel “Vienna+20: The Way Forward”
  - **Afternoon:** Parallel Working Groups
Day 2
- Morning: Parallel Working Groups (continued)
- Noon: Concluding Plenary Discussion “Vienna+20: Towards a Human Rights Agenda for the 21st Century”

Working Groups:
Topics:
1) Strengthening the Rule of Law: The Right to an Effective Remedy for Victims of Human Rights Violations
The VDPA emphasised the rule of law as a prerequisite for the effective protection of human rights. It did so, among others, by recognizing a right for all victims of human rights violations to an effective remedy and adequate reparation for the harm suffered. Individuals now have the right to lodge individual complaints before the UN treaty bodies when certain conditions are met. The Human Rights Council and the UN human rights mechanisms, including special procedures, have also made key contributions to the elaboration of the concept of the rule of law.

This Working Group shall discuss how global human rights mechanisms can become more effective in providing victims with access to justice and comprehensive redress. In this context, it will build upon the ongoing UN treaty body strengthening process, especially regarding the individual complaints procedures, and examine how these may be enhanced; address proposals for strengthening judicial mechanisms at national and international level; and discuss how the international criminal justice system contributes to and interacts with the human rights system.

The Working Group will also pay special attention to the situation of human rights defenders and their access to effective remedies. In this context, special attention will be paid to victims of reprisals, particularly when they occur for cooperating with international and regional human rights organisations. The Working Group will also look into good practises for the protection of human rights defenders. Finally, the Working Group will discuss how the UN and other international actors could provide support, at the regional and national level, in bringing perpetrators to justice.

2) Realising Human Rights of Women Universally: Tackling the Implementation Gap
“We women’s rights are human rights“ is one of the most prominent messages of the VDPA. This Working Group shall, also with a view to the upcoming 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, assess whether the commitments made at the Vienna World Conference have been realised, where gaps remain, and what new challenges have arisen since 1993.

A particular focus of the Working Group shall be put on the role of women in political and public life. In many countries, women are still largely excluded from political participation and decision-making processes and encounter major obstacles when publicly promoting and protecting human rights. At the same time, these actors, including in particular women journalists and human rights defenders, make crucial contributions as agents of change and multipliers, especially during political transition and in post-conflict situations. Which strategies and mechanisms at the national, regional and international level are available to promote and protect female (human rights) activists, including against sexual and other
violence and reprisals? Have they been effective and how can they be further strengthened? Have indicators, such as those developed on the basis of SC Res. 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”, proven useful so far, bearing in mind the constant challenge of effective implementation? While experts from all regions and with different backgrounds shall be invited to discuss, a strong focus will be put on the participation of young activists and their role, including in recent democracy movements e.g. “the Arab Spring”, in order to give a voice to a new generation of women leaders.


Since the Vienna World Conference, the mainstreaming of human rights into development activities and policies has been promoted at many levels, but progress has not been even and a full integration of human rights is still at large. By 2015, when the target date for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is reached, a new framework is to be adopted. Preparations are already well underway: Consultations are taking place in many countries, the UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel of Eminent Persons will soon release its report and an intergovernmental process has begun within the framework of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals.

This Working Group will discuss the key challenges for ensuring that human rights are fully integrated in the post-2015 Development Agenda. It will examine how the new framework can ensure that human rights principles such as equality, non-discrimination, participation and accountability will be consistently taken into account in all development measures. What measures are necessary to better realise the human rights of those suffering the greatest discrimination and exclusion, including persons with disabilities, minorities, migrants, women and children? How can these and other groups be empowered as human rights claim-holders under a post-2015 agreement, rather than passive beneficiaries of charitable assistance?

Moreover, the Working Group will discuss how to ensure that contributions of the human rights system and its various mechanisms are systematically integrated into the development discussion. How can other key human rights stakeholders, such as civil society or National Human Rights Institutions, be better integrated in the development discourse? Finally, how can the accountability of States, UN organisations, international financial institutions, the private sector and other duty bearers be better defined and ensured?

Methodology:

Each Working Group shall be composed of 25 to 30 experts, a moderator and a rapporteur. In preparation of the Conference, participants will receive a background paper for their Working Group as a basis for discussion. At the same time, experts are encouraged to submit brief contributions outlining their views on the Working Group topic ahead of the Conference, based on their specific expertise and experience. Each Working Group shall result in a number of short, practical recommendations to be addressed to States and other stakeholders for further action. In addition, a subsequent publication will document the Conference outcome and include expert contributions.

The conference language will be English.