 Statement

by

Mr Aleks Semerciyan
Austrian Youth Delegate

at the

68th UN General Assembly - Third Committee

New York, 7 October 2013
Mr Chair, distinguished delegates,

I am honoured to be able to address the General Assembly of the United Nations and I’m exceptionally proud to speak to you on behalf of the children and young people of Austria.

In my time in office as Austrian Youth Delegate, I had many conversations with young Austrians and youth organizations about various issues children and young people are concerned with. Our discussions have focussed on global topics such as human rights, development activities, education, employment, international peace and security as well as sustainability.

The basic consensus is the recognition of the numerous efforts made by the international community in recent years to improve the situation of children and young people worldwide. In 2000, the endorsement of the Millennium Development Goals was a unique momentum in history to advance in the most critical areas of human development. In some of these areas, the situation has remarkably improved and we are on the right path to achieve the goals set for the future. In several other areas, much more attention, effort and support are needed: several million children and young people throughout the world are still facing precarious living conditions with regard to water, nutrition, sanitation, health services, basic education and a secure environment in which to live a peaceful and healthy life.

If the international community wishes to maintain its credibility, a strong and ambitious post-2015 development agenda is the only tool to succeed. In the era of 2015 and beyond, the inclusion of youth will be crucial to achieve these challenging future goals.

Mr Chair,

More than half of the population on this planet is under the age of 30, therefore the social and political participation of children and young people is important on all levels. Nowadays young people are equal and effective partners in decision making. We therefore want to engage stronger and also share the burden of handling the various challenges humanity is facing today.
In this regard, we welcome the Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda on Youth and, in particular, the nomination of the Secretary-General’s first ever Special
Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi at the beginning of this year. His work and dedication have been remarkable and inspiring, and I would like to commend him for this on behalf of Austria. We consider his four priority areas, namely Participation, Advocacy, Partnerships and Harmonisation crucial for ensuring full participation of young people in the decision-making process and must acknowledge its importance on all levels. The role of the Special Envoy on Youth is particularly important for achieving a truly socially inclusive society, with special attention being paid to those young people not in education, employment or training, to those with a multi-ethnic background as well as those with special needs.

Mr Chair,

Children and young people, especially girls, young women and those with disabilities are among the most vulnerable in situations of war, conflict and violence. Several million children and young people around the world are refugees, internally displaced or stateless and therefore are at great risk of abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, trafficking or forced military recruitment. According to UNICEF, such conditions are likely to have longterm adverse consequences for the formation of children’s values, political beliefs and their ability to function as leaders and decision makers. As long as we do not adequately protect the weakest and youngest in some areas of the world, and as long they are made to bear the responsibility for actions they never took, we are jeopardizing the destiny of future generations.
Moreover, young people have to be seen as important stakeholders and therefore assets in every peace building and reconciliation process to create a peaceful, respectful, violence-free society and to establish a prosperous future for everybody.

Mr Chair,

As recognised by the Secretary-General, youth are a transformative force and have the potential to act as creative, resourceful and enthusiastic agents for change. I call upon everybody to make use of this untapped potential of children and youth and tackle the global challenges together with us. Let us make this planet a better, more peaceful, sustainable and prosperous place to live for each and every one of us. And let us start right now.

Thank you.