

151st IPU Assembly - General Debate

“Upholding humanitarian norms and supporting humanitarian action in times of crisis”

Statement by the Head of the Austrian Delegation Dr. Barbara Kolm, MP

Geneva, Switzerland

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Honourable President,
Honourable Speakers,
Colleagues,

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude for convening this debate on a topic that touches the very core of our shared humanity.

Today, more than 300 million people around the world depend on humanitarian assistance.

Each of them – not just a number – but an individual’s life disrupted by war, conflict, or disaster.

And tragically, much of this suffering is man-made.

The number and complexity of crises have risen dramatically.

From armed conflicts to climate-induced disasters, civilian populations are paying the highest price.

At the same time, the very norms designed to protect human dignity – international humanitarian law – are increasingly under pressure due to the erosion.

Upholding these principles is not just a legal obligation.

It is a moral one.

In our interconnected world, humanitarian action is a shared responsibility.

Austria sees itself as a partner in solidarity within the international community – guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and impartiality.

These values are not abstract to us.

They are part of who we are.

They are part of our history.

Fostering solidarity and coordinated action across nations is key to ensure stability, resilience, and human dignity worldwide.

After all – division of labor - helps us create economic growth, stability, wealth and mass flourishing – in order to paraphrase two Nobel Prize winners in economics – the late Austrian F.A. v. Hayek (1974) and the American Edmund Phelps (2006). But also the combined work of the 2025 winners Mokyr, Aghion & Howitt underscores that growth must be defended – which can only be achieved by collaboration. Their

emphasis on open intellectual culture and institutional flexibility can be used to argue for competitive, dynamic, and discovery-driven institutional ecosystems.

Again, only through cooperation, and a sense of global collaboration, can we respond effectively to the needs of those currently affected the most.

In Gaza, the suffering of civilians has reached unbearable levels,

In Ukraine, the ongoing attacks on civilian and energy infrastructure leaving millions without power, water, or essential services.

And in Sudan, the civil war that has been raging since April 2023 has drastically exacerbated a long-standing humanitarian emergency caused by natural disasters and the global food crisis. This has led to one of the largest humanitarian crises and famine.

As an active member of the international community, a host country of the United Nations, Austria remains committed to multilateralism, to peacebuilding, and to humanitarian cooperation.

We work closely with the United Nations' humanitarian agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the World Food Programme.

This week, Austria commemorates its National Day – marking seventy years since the declaration of our permanent neutrality, and the signing of our State Treaty in 1955.

Our neutrality was born out of the devastation of war, and it stands today as a living commitment – to peace, to dialogue, and to humanitarian responsibility.

Neutrality does not mean indifference.

It means engagement – active, principled, and impartial.

Colleagues,

For Austria, neutrality is not passive.

It is the bridge that allows us to foster dialogue when others cannot.

It gives us the credibility to call out violations of humanitarian law – wherever they occur –

without taking sides,

but always taking a stand for human dignity.

In short: Humanitarian action is not charity.

It is justice.

It is about defending our common humanity, and preserving the moral compass that must guide our global community.

Let us, therefore, continue to speak, to act, and to build partnerships across nations. Only through cooperation can we ensure that our shared values – peace, dignity, and compassion – remain stronger than the forces that seek to divide us.

Thank you.