

**Key-Note HBK HLPF 13. Juli 2021, New York**

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

**Thank you** for the invitation to speak to you here today.

The fact that we are able to meet **in person**, even in this slightly restricted format, is very **encouraging**.

I was asked to share with you **Austria's experience**

with one of the biggest challenges in recent history, the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

As you know and as many speakers pointed out over the last days, the **global impact** of the pandemic has been dramatic:

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- For the first time in the last 30 years, we saw a **reversal in global human development**.
- **120 million** people fell into **extreme poverty**.
- More than **250 million jobs** were **lost**.

The challenges we face are extraordinary.

We see **positive developments** on global economic growth for some states,

but many countries are at **risk of being left behind** if we do not take the right steps today.

One thing is clear: we have to **work together and we have to support each other**.

We must **learn from one another** and **share best practices**.

Let me briefly outline **three of the most important lessons** we have learned **in Austria** during our COVID response:

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Firstly, **tests** have been **key** to stop the spread of the virus.

Without testing, there is **no data**. And without data, you cannot react in real-time and focus efforts on where they are most needed.

We learned this early and quickly **expanded our testing capacities** and we introduced so-called “entry tests”.

So when we re-opened **schools**, for example, we introduced **easy self-tests** for students of all age groups 2 to 3 times a week.

Today, Austria figures among the countries with the **highest rate of COVID-tests per capita worldwide,**  
**with about 2 million tests per week on a population of less than 9 million.**

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Secondly, while the pandemic is a fight for each human life, it is also a fight for **survival for small and medium companies**.

We immediately started programs to **mitigate the social and economic fallout**.

A special form of “**short-time work**” policy enabled companies to reduce the amount of paid hours worked, while employees received direct income support from the government. Since the start of the pandemic, this policy **saved over 1 million jobs**.

Thirdly, we also realized during the pandemic that we needed to **get better in the field of digitalization**.

We therefore increased our support in this area and we will invest 1.4 billion Euro in **our broadband** infrastructure for **companies, public administration and schools**,

with the **goal** to provide nation-wide broadband coverage by 2030.

And we also launched an **investment premium** for companies with a special focus on digitalization.

In addition to the lessons we have learned in Austria,

I would like to **stress one point** that I believe we've all experienced during this pandemic, namely the value of **international cooperation and solidarity**.

Mr Secretary General,

over the past year, you often underlined that we must **counter this pandemic together** and I fully agree.

As part of **Team Europe**, Austria counts among the lead contributors to COVAX.

Earlier this year, we pioneered by coordinating the transfer of more than **600.000 vaccines** to the Western Balkan States out of the **EU Vaccine Sharing mechanism**.

In addition, Austria will provide another 1 million vaccine doses to our neighbours in the **Western Balkans**.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The COVID-19 pandemic hit all of us hard,

but it also shed light on **global weaknesses and inequalities**.

At the same time, the **international community** swiftly mobilized to respond.

I applaud **all actors across the UN system** who have teamed up to enable this response and have been in the **front line** in the most affected places.

Let me **thank these brave men and women** through you, Mr Secretary General, for their **commitment and their hard work**.

As host to one of the **UN headquarters**, we have tried our best to ensure that UN staff and their families in **Vienna** remain safe and healthy throughout this pandemic.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To recover better and greener from the crisis, **we need to adapt our policies**.

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We need solutions that build a world that is **more sustainable, inclusive, just, equal and resilient.**

**The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change remain **our roadmap** to achieve this goal.

They will help us emerge from this crisis even stronger.

**Within the EU, the European Green Deal** is our sustainable growth strategy. With this, the EU aims to achieve **climate neutrality by 2050.**

Mr Secretary General,

In the COVID-19 response, the **role of partnerships** and the value of the UN as a **global forum** have been essential.

It is our joint responsibility as international community to **support the most vulnerable regions of the world** and to “leave no-one behind”.

Austria will continue to stand side-by-side with partners in need, including the **least developed countries,** the **landlocked developing countries** and the **small island developing states.**

Mr President,

**The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** will be our **joint compass** to build forward better from the COVID crisis.

Austria presented its first **Voluntary National Review** of the implementation of the SDGs **last year**.

In the recently published Sustainable Development Report 2021, Austria was once again ranked among the **top ten countries**.

We are proud to see our efforts **recognized internationally** and we remain committed **to continuing on this path**.

Our **ECOSOC Membership** will also reflect our **firm commitment to our Global Goals** as outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

We look forward to **close cooperation** with our partners

in this crucial area of **UN work** to overcome the **socio-economic impacts** of the pandemic.

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Dear colleagues,

The Covid crisis showed us many areas where we need to get **better**.

However, the pandemic also **brought out the best in us**:

- Health workers and other essential frontline workers across the globe risked their lives to **keep others safe**.
- Global scientific cooperation made it possible to **develop vaccines in record time**.
- **Multilateral mechanisms** were created to help countries **in need of vaccines**.

Much more needs to be done, but these examples give hope that we can **overcome this crisis together and get back to normality**.

Let us **build on this hope** and **turn it into momentum**.

Let us apply the **same determination in the remaining years until 2030**.

**Austria** stands ready to do **its share** during this **crucial Decade of Action**.

Thank you.