

UN Human Rights Council

Agenda Item 4

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar (Burma)

Geneva, 12 March 2012

**Statement delivered by Ambassador Christian Strohal,
Permanent Representative of AUSTRIA**

Thank you Mme President,

Mr Special Rapporteur,

Austria fully aligns herself with the statement of the European Union.

We thank you for your presentation today and the progress report. We commend you for this interesting report and appreciate your recent visit to Burma/Myanmar. However, we have to express regret that the report was only made available to delegations at such a late time.

We agree with your assessment that the country has reached an important and critical point in its development and have seen many encouraging signals over the recent months. We are, therefore, also pleased to hear about the constructive engagement by the Government of Myanmar with your mandate.

We welcome the release of political prisoners. However, these releases must be unconditional and we urge the government to speed up its efforts to ensure that all prisoners of conscience are released. This would indeed be a significant milestone.

We also share your positive assessment of visible signs of progress with regard to the political transformation. Austria deems the upcoming by-elections on the 1st of April an important test for the successful continuation of the democratic transformation process. It is of paramount importance that these elections will be truly free, fair, inclusive and transparent.

We welcome the recently announced cease-fires in the country's ethnic conflicts and call upon the government to further pursue the ongoing national reconciliation process. While there can be no doubt about the importance of a political settlement and reconciliation process, the central aspect of accountability for serious human rights violations, including attacks against civilians, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, internal displacement, land confiscation, the recruitment of child soldiers, forced labour, as well as the use of landmines, has so far been insufficiently addressed.

We welcome efforts at legislative reform. However, as you also point out, serious problems and shortcomings remain. We call on the government to undertake serious reforms in order to make the judiciary system truly independent, impartial and effective. We also remain seriously concerned about detention conditions in general, torture and treatment of prisoners, including access to legal counsel and judicial review.

- We would like to seek your views on how your mandate, the OHCHR and the wider UN system, as well as the international community, can best support the government in this important task?

Austria is convinced that full accountability for human rights violations is of paramount importance to the process of political transformation and national reconciliation. We fully support your call on the Government to credibly demonstrate its willingness and commitment to address the issue of truth, justice and accountability and take the necessary measures for the investigation of human rights violations, conducted in an independent, impartial and credible manner.

I thank you.