

The Vienna International Centre: Keeping Pace with the Growth of Global Challenges



The year 2004 marks the 25th anniversary of the Vienna International Centre. The past 25 years of the United Nations in Vienna have been characterized by excellent relations and cooperation with the host country Austria and the population of the City of Vienna. Important political events over the past quarter century, such as the liberalization process in Eastern and Central Europe, have enhanced Vienna's role as an international city and meeting place. The enlargement of the European Union in May 2004 further enhanced Vienna's geographic position in the very heart of Europe and elevates the stature of the Vienna International Centre, host of the third Headquarters of the United Nations, as a forum for international cooperation.

The United Nations in Vienna has kept pace with the changing face of global challenges. In 1997, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan designated Vienna as the centre of the United Nations fight against "uncivil society", namely those elements which take advantage of the benefits of globalization to traffic in human beings and illegal drugs, launder money and engage in terrorism. Moreover, the downside of globalization has prompted the emergence of new and different forms of global threats, beside the traditional ones. New forms of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction parallel other issues of equal concern, such as the persistence of extreme poverty, the disparity of income between and within societies, the spread of infectious diseases, climate change and environmental degradation.

To rise to new challenges while addressing the old ones, the Vienna International Centre has constantly adapted and re-engineered itself over the years. New organizations have arisen and established organizations have been reformed. Drugs, crime and terrorism are now simultaneously tackled by the United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC). Following the escalation of global terror and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Vienna has emerged as the global centre for nuclear non-proliferation. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) plays a critical international role as does the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), which was established in 1997. The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), which has been at the VIC since 1996, is working towards securing peaceful use of outer space. In 2003, a Division of the Office for Internal Oversight Services was transferred from New York to Vienna. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) continue to facilitate development and international trade, while the UNHCR Representation in Austria works to safeguard the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

I am convinced that the Vienna International Centre will retain its dynamic character and continue to serve as a crossroads in the work for international cooperation and understanding and, thus, serve the global responsibility of the United Nations: the maintenance of peace and security as well as the promotion of economic and social development. Operating, as we do, from the heart of Europe gives us the opportunity to join the European enlargement with United Nations visions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Antonio Maria Costa'.

Antonio Maria Costa
Director-General
United Nations Office at Vienna