The Vienna International Centre

OVER 4,000 EMPLOYEES FROM MORE THAN 100 COUNTRIES WORK FROM VIENNA TO MEET THE IDEAS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations came to Vienna almost 50 years ago. The first guest was the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which based itself in the Grand Hotel on the Ring, next to the Opera house in Vienna's historic city centre in 1957. The newly-established UNIDO—the United Nations Industrial Development Organization—followed ten years later. It set up offices in the "Felderhaus" (next to the Rathaus) and some adjacent buildings. When the Vienna International Centre opened its doors in 1979, a number of other United Nations bodies moved to the banks of the Danube. Vienna became, along with New York, Geneva and Nairobi, one of the four United Nations Headquarters.

The creation of the Vienna International Centre began in 1966, when the Austrian Federal Government made an offer to the United Nations. It offered to construct an international centre in Vienna, which could serve as headquarters for the IAEA and UNIDO. In a joint decision taken the following year, the Federal Government and the Municipality of Vienna designated an area on the left bank of the Danube as the site of the international centre. Once it was decided that Vienna would be a new home for the United Nations, an international architectural competition was held, where some 656 architects from 50 different countries sent in their ideas and designs for the centre. The responses were narrowed down to four choices, and finally, Austrian architect Johann Staber's design was selected. The construction of the Vienna International Centre began in the spring of 1973.

The individual buildings were planned keeping in mind their future use; as office, conference and service buildings. The construction costs for the complex were shared by the Austrian Federal Government (65 per cent) and the Municipality of Vienna (35 per cent).

On 23 August 1979, the Vienna International Centre was handed over to the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Commonly known as "UNO City", it has been rented to the organizations for 99 years at a symbolic rate of 1 Austrian schilling (7 cents) annually.

Today, the Vienna International Centre houses the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV), the United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO PrepCom) and the United Nations Commission for International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Other United Nations organizations and entities with offices in Vienna are the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the United Nations Postal Administration—Vienna Section (UNPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), which coordinates environmental projects along the Danube.

Offices and organizations that were temporarily based at the Vienna International Centre during the last 25 years include the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (CSDHA) (moved back to New York in 1993) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (moved back to Gaza in 1995).

More than 4,000 employees from over 100 countries work for the Vienna-based organizations. Numerous international conferences and meetings are held annually at the Vienna International Centre. Events of a much larger dimension are held in the adjacent Austria Center.

Twenty-five years after it first opened its doors, the Vienna International Centre continues to play an important role in the United Nations, besides offering many benefits for its host country Austria.