WUS AUSTRIA: The First 15 Years

“Returning from a conference of the International World University Service (WUS) in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1982, my valued teacher and colleague Professor Dr. Konrad Ginther brought with him the idea of founding an Austrian committee of the World University Service. I gladly took over the implementation of this project. Through this, interested higher education teachers and students could take part in a world-wide network which was just as relevant in South Africa to those suffering under Apartheid as to those living in then military dictatorships in Latin America, but also in Asia, Canada and Europe.”

(Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Benedek, Co-Founder & Chairman of WUS Austria)

Since its establishment as a non-profit organisation in Graz in 1983, WUS Austria has been working on the promotion of higher education in various countries all over the world. Since 1994, following the conflict in former Yugoslavia, WUS Austria has developed a regional focus on South Eastern Europe (SEE).

When the war in the Balkans began in 1991, the Austrian committee of the WUS was one of the first to recognize their responsibility in terms of protecting the right to education.

1983

“World University Service Austrian Committee” was re-founded in Graz with three active groups in Graz, Vienna and Salzburg.

The 1980s and early 1990s

The newly founded WUS Austria was concerned with legal aid programs in South Africa and the support of the militarily-occupied universities in Latin America, and collaborated with committees in India and Sri Lanka.

WUS Austria also ran post-graduate summer courses in Stadtschlaining and then in Makerere University in Kampala.

Of special importance here were the support for the right to education for those being politically pursued, and the autonomy of the universities. In this vein, the so-called Lima Declaration regarding freedom and autonomy in higher education was produced by the 1988 WUS general meeting. Manfred Nowak, who is still active as a board member of WUS Austria today, was the driving force behind this important step.

Until 1990

WUS International was mainly involved in supporting higher education in Africa and Latin America and offered thousands of refugee-students the chance to proceed with their education.