

**2015 Review Conference of the Parties  
to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation  
of Nuclear Weapons**

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**The Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons  
(8-9 December 2014) and the Austrian Pledge: Input for the  
NPT 2015 Review Conference**

**Working paper submitted by Austria**

1. Since the 2010 Review Conference of the NPT “*expresse(d) its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear and reaffirm(ed) the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law*”, the international community has increased its focus on addressing the humanitarian impact of and the risks associated with nuclear weapons. An ever increasing number of States has signed up to several cross-regional statements on this issue since 2012 and three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons were organized in Oslo, Norway (March 2013), Nayarit, Mexico (February 2014) and in Vienna Austria on 8 and 9 December 2014.

2. The facts based discussions and expert presentations at these conferences generated strong interest in the international community and highly relevant input for the NPT and its key objectives of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Foremost of all, the evidence presented in the course of the conferences underscored the urgency of concrete progress on nuclear disarmament and the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons.
  
3. The Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons ([www.hinw14vienna.at](http://www.hinw14vienna.at)) was attended by 158 States, a broad spectrum of international organizations from the UN system, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, many academics and experts and several hundred representatives of civil society. The Conference was opened by Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz; the UN Secretary General, the President of the ICRC and Pope Francis addressed the Conference through important statements and messages. Victims of nuclear explosions gave testimonies of their harrowing experiences.
  
4. The Chair's Summary of the Vienna Conference, which Austria presented in her sole responsibility, contains the following eight key conclusions that have emerged in the context of the humanitarian initiative the international conferences in Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna. These are:
  - i. The impact of a nuclear weapon detonation, irrespective of the cause, would not be constrained by national borders and could have regional and even global consequences, causing destruction, death and displacement as well as profound

and long-term damage to the environment, climate, human health and well-being, socioeconomic development, social order and could even threaten the survival of humankind.

- ii. The scope, scale and interrelationship of the humanitarian consequences caused by nuclear weapon detonations are catastrophic and more complex than commonly understood. These consequences can be large scale and potentially irreversible.
- iii. The use and testing of nuclear weapons have demonstrated their devastating immediate, mid- and long-term effects. Nuclear testing in several parts of the world has left a legacy of serious health and environmental consequences. Radioactive contamination from these tests disproportionately affects women and children. It contaminated food supplies and continues to be measurable in the atmosphere to this day.
- iv. As long as nuclear weapons exist, there remains the possibility of a nuclear weapon explosion. Even if the probability is considered low, given the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation, the risk is unacceptable. The risks of accidental, mistaken, unauthorized or intentional use of nuclear weapons are evident due to the vulnerability of nuclear command and control networks to human error and cyber-attacks, the maintaining of nuclear arsenals on high levels of alert, forward deployment and their modernization.

These risks increase over time. The dangers of access to nuclear weapons and related materials by non-state actors, particularly terrorist groups, persists.

- v. There are many circumstances in which nuclear weapons could be used in view of international conflicts and tensions, and against the background of the current security doctrines of States possessing nuclear weapons. As nuclear deterrence entails preparing for nuclear war, the risk of nuclear weapon use is real. Opportunities to reduce risk must be taken now, such as de-alerting and reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines. Limiting the role of nuclear weapons to deterrence does not remove the possibility of their use. Nor does it address the risks stemming from accidental use. The only assurance against the risk of a nuclear weapon detonation is the total elimination of nuclear weapons.
- vi. No state or international body could address in an adequate manner the immediate humanitarian emergency or long-term consequences caused by a nuclear weapon detonation in a populated area, nor provide adequate assistance to those affected. Such capacity is unlikely ever to exist. Coordinated preparedness may nevertheless be useful in mitigating the effects including of a terrorist event involving the explosion of an improvised nuclear device. The imperative of prevention as the only guarantee against the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use was highlighted.
- vii. Looking at nuclear weapons from a number of different legal angles, it is clear that there is no comprehensive legal norm universally prohibiting possession,

transfer, production and use. International environmental law remains applicable in armed conflict and can pertain to nuclear weapons, although it does not specifically regulate these arms. Likewise, international health regulations would cover effects of nuclear weapons. The new evidence that has emerged in the last two years about the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons casts further doubt on whether these weapons could ever be used in conformity with IHL. As was the case with torture, which defeats humanity and is now unacceptable to all, the suffering caused by nuclear weapons use is not only a legal matter, it necessitates moral appraisal.

- viii. The catastrophic consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation event and the risks associated with the mere existence of these weapons raise profound ethical and moral questions on a level transcending legal discussions and interpretations.
5. It is Austria's view that these conclusions constitute a powerful set of arguments that should lead to an urgent and profound change in the nuclear weapons debate. Also, these conclusions demonstrate the interest and responsibility that all States have with regard to nuclear disarmament.
6. As Host and Chair of the Vienna Conference and in light of the important facts and findings that had been presented, Austria, solely in her national capacity, drew a number of inescapable conclusions and pledged to take them forward with interested parties in available fora, including in the context of the NPT and the 2015 Review Conference.

## Austrian Pledge

- i. Mindful of the unacceptable harm that victims of nuclear weapons explosions and nuclear testing have experienced and recognizing that the rights and needs of victims have not yet been adequately addressed,
- ii. Understanding that the immediate, mid- and long-term consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion are significantly graver than it was understood in the past and will not be constrained by national borders but have regional or even global effects, potentially threatening the survival of humanity,
- iii. Recognizing the complexity of and interrelationship between these consequences on health, environment, infrastructure, food security, climate, development, social cohesion and the global economy that are systemic and potentially irreversible,
- iv. Aware that the risk of a nuclear weapon explosion is significantly greater than previously assumed and is indeed increasing with increased proliferation, the lowering of the technical threshold for nuclear weapon capability, the ongoing modernisation of nuclear weapon arsenals in nuclear weapon possessing States, and the role that is attributed to nuclear weapons in the nuclear doctrines of possessor States,
- v. Cogniscent of the fact that the risk of nuclear weapons use with their unacceptable consequences can only be avoided when all nuclear weapons have been eliminated,

- vi. Emphasizing that the consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion and the risks associated with nuclear weapons concern the security of all humanity and that all States share the responsibility to prevent any use of nuclear weapons,
- vii. Emphasizing that the scope of consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion and risks associated raise profound moral and ethical questions that go beyond debates about the legality of nuclear weapons,
- viii. Mindful that no national or international response capacity exists that would adequately respond to the human suffering and humanitarian harm that would result from a nuclear weapon explosion in a populated area, and that such capacity most likely will never exist,
- ix. Affirming that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances,
- x. Reiterating the crucial role that international organizations, relevant UN entities, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, elected representatives, academia and civil society play for advancing the shared objective of a nuclear weapon free world,
- xi. Austria regards it as her responsibility and consequently pledges to present the facts-based discussions, findings and compelling evidence of the Vienna Conference, which builds upon the previous conferences in Oslo and Nayarit, to all relevant fora, in particular the NPT Review Conference 2015 and in the UN framework, as they should be at the centre of all deliberations, obligations and commitments with regard to nuclear disarmament,

- xii. Austria pledges to follow the imperative of human security for all and to promote the protection of civilians against risks stemming from nuclear weapons,
  - xiii. Austria calls on all States parties to the NPT to renew their commitment to the urgent and full implementation of existing obligations under Article VI, and to this end, to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and Austria pledges to cooperate with all stakeholders to achieve this goal,
  - xiv. Austria calls on all nuclear weapons possessor States to take concrete interim measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapon detonations, including reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons and moving nuclear weapons away from deployment into storage, diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines and rapid reductions of all types of nuclear weapons,
  - xv. Austria pledges to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders, States, International Organisations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements, parliamentarians and civil society, in efforts to stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated.
7. Austria subsequently invited all interested States to associate themselves with this Pledge in order to further strengthen the humanitarian arguments and findings and to underscore the expectation of the international community for credible and urgent progress for the achievement of a nuclear weapon free world.

8. By the time of submission of this working paper, formal endorsements and/or expressions of support for the Pledge has been received by: Afghanistan, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda\*, Argentina\*, Bahamas\*, Barbados\*, Belize\*, Bolivia (Plurinational State of)\*, Brazil\*, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chile\*, Colombia\*, Costa Rica\*, Cuba\*, Cyprus, Dominica\*, Dominican Republic\*, Ecuador\*, Egypt, El Salvador\*, Grenada\*, Guatemala\*, Guinea Bissau, Guyana\*, Haiti\*, Honduras\*, Iraq, Ireland, Jamaica\*, Kenya, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libya, Liechtenstein, Malawi, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico\*, Nicaragua\*, Palau, Palestine, Panama\*, Paraguay\*, Peru\*, Philippines, Saint Kitts and Nevis\*, Saint Lucia\*, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines\*, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Somalia, South Africa, Suriname\*, Swaziland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago\*, Tuvalu, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay\*, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)\*. This list is available in an updated form at [www.bmeia.gv.at/update-pledge-support](http://www.bmeia.gv.at/update-pledge-support).

\*) These States declared their support for the Pledge through the Special Declaration of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) on the “Urgent Need for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World”, which resulted from the Third Summit of CELAC, held in Belén, Costa Rica, on January 28 and 29, 2015.

9. Austria herewith transmits the findings contained in the Chair’s Summary of the Vienna Conference and the conclusions and commitments contained in the Austrian Pledge to the

2015 NPT Review Conference. Austria is of the view that these findings, conclusions and commitments are of high relevance for the NPT and should thus be a key element of the deliberations at the 2015 Review Conference and its outcome documents.

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