

# AUSTRIA



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**2016 UNGA First Committee Debate on  
Conventional Weapons - Austria Statement 2016**

**AUSTRIA**

**delivered by**

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*Check against delivery*

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Mr. Chairman,

Austria aligns herself with the statement delivered by the European Union earlier during this debate. In addition, I would like to highlight a few priority issues for Austria.

The prevention of human suffering and assistance to victims of armed conflict and armed violence must remain at the heart of our efforts.

UNSC Res. 1325 (2000) was the first to address the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women. In the Austrian view, a gender perspective should be incorporated in all disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation efforts. The full and equal participation of women and men at all stages and levels of decision-making should be ensured.

The indiscriminate effects and unacceptable humanitarian consequences of anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions have led to these weapons being banned. Nevertheless, these weapons continue to cost human life and cause human tragedy. This underscores the necessity of the full universalization of the Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Austria reiterates that the obligation to protect civilians from unnecessary harm applies to all States already now.

Austria is proud to assume the Chairmanship of the Ottawa Convention in 2017. We will strive hard to further all the aims of the Convention. Victim assistance has always been in the focus of the Austrian attention and will continue to be so.

The First Review Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, as well as the 6th Meeting of States Parties held in Geneva last September were an opportunity to take stock of the first successful five years of the Convention. By adopting a political declaration and the Dubrovnik Action Plan, the Conference created important guidance for our future work. Austria – together with Chile - as Coordinators were pleased to have made a contribution to advance the effective cooperation and assistance between all relevant stakeholders, and across regions.

At the same time, Austria remains seriously concerned about reports on the continued use of cluster munitions in a number of on-going conflicts. We call on all actors to refrain from the use of these indiscriminate weapons.

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Austria would also highlight specifically the concern about the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as a major cause of civilian harm in many countries. An increasing number of governments share this concern. Civilian casualties from explosive weapons in urban settings amounted to a recorded global number of more than 40.000 deaths and injuries in 2014 alone, dramatically higher than military casualties and disproportionately affecting women and children. This is a humanitarian problem of extreme gravity.

The recent bombing of Aleppo is a tragic example of this. Unfortunately, there are other examples as well. The growing numbers of refugees that are currently forced to leave their war-ridden homes testify to this. Many people are desperate to find shelter abroad, precisely because of the violence and the use of explosive weapons in their countries of origin and the lack or breakdown of protection for civilian populations. And these people are the lucky ones!

In 2015, Austria and UN-OCHA jointly convened an international expert meeting on this problem in Vienna with around twenty States, the ICRC, various UN agencies, as well as civil society represented. This meeting highlighted the importance of awareness-raising on the basis of continuing collection and dissemination of data, as well as the sharing and promotion of States' good practices in using explosive weapons.

Significant support was expressed at a side event co-organized by Austria for a group of like-minded States on 4 October here in New York. We propose to issue an international political declaration to prevent civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The United Nations Secretary General has encouraged all States to engage constructively in such an initiative.

As one of the first States that have signed and ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, Austria welcomes the speedy entry into force of the Treaty on 24 December 2014. The Second Conference of States Parties in Geneva this August has further defined the institutional frame for an effective implementation and the universalisation of the ATT. This is an important contribution to human security, human rights and development.

With a view to the falling number of inputs to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, Austria welcomes the results of the last round of UNROCA Group of Governmental Experts meetings, held this July in Geneva. The inclusion of small arms and light weapons as an additional subgroup for a trial period of three years ("7+1") as well as the inclusion of fixed-wing unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCACs) will make UNROCA more effective and relevant and thus will raise the international community's interest in this important tool of international arms control.

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Mr. Chairman,

Before I conclude, let me put on record here one more concern of my country. This is the prospect of development of lethal autonomous weapons systems. With technological innovation moving fast, we risk crossing a very dangerous threshold soon. We should be very careful to make sure that the application of such technologies is consistent with ethical, political and legal imperatives. Therefore, we are in favour of deepening and intensifying the on-going international debate about lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Thank you.