

AUSTRIA



PERMANENT MISSION OF AUSTRIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

United Nations Disarmament Commission

Statement by Austria

delivered by

Thomas Hajnoczi
Permanent Representative of Austria
to the United Nations in Geneva

New York, 4 October 2016

Check against delivery

AUSTRIA



PERMANENT MISSION OF AUSTRIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset let me congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency and assure you of the full support of the Austrian delegation.

Austria is aligned with the statement (to be) delivered on behalf of the European Union earlier (later) in this debate. I intend therefore to focus my remarks on a few questions of particular attention.

First and foremost I want to set out our position on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Only a couple of weeks ago the DPRK conducted its fifth nuclear test. This provocative and irresponsible act drew instant international condemnation, including by the Austrian foreign minister, who stated "Twenty years after the opening of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty for signature, the incident underscores the urgency for that treaty to finally enter into force. I call on all States which have not already done so and in particular those listed in Annex II of the Treaty to accede to it without delay."

The latest DPRK nuclear test is also a stark reminder that nuclear proliferation is actually happening right before our eyes.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty rests on a careful balance between non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. Both are equally important and closely interconnected. Major strides towards nuclear disarmament by the nuclear-possessor states would remove a stimulus for other States to acquire such weapons, directly benefiting the treaty's non-proliferation objective.

The nuclear disarmament obligation of Article VI of the NPT has been implemented in a way which at best can be called incomplete. The justification most often heard for this lack of action is that national security cannot be guaranteed without nuclear deterrence. If that would be so, then many more states could feel the need to develop nuclear weapons. Austria does not believe that nuclear weapons bring more security, on the contrary we see them as a threat to international security and that implies to the national security of all states and people.

Worryingly enough, nuclear proliferation and the very persistence of nuclear weapons means that the probability of a nuclear weapon explosion will actually occur increases. Even a residual risk of a nuclear weapon explosion is unacceptable in view of its devastating humanitarian impact. That horrendous impact has been demonstrated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In recent

AUSTRIA



PERMANENT MISSION OF AUSTRIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

years scientists have come to the conclusion that the immediate, medium-term and long-term impact of a nuclear weapon explosion would be significantly graver than was understood in the past. It would not be constrained by national borders but would have regional or even global effects, potentially threatening the survival of humanity. This was also one of the key findings of the international conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons held in late 2014 in Vienna. This concern found its reflection in the so-called Humanitarian Pledge, which was launched on that occasion and has been endorsed so far by 127 countries. The Humanitarian Pledge was welcomed by last year's United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/48. I want to thank for the broad support. The resolution will be tabled as an updated draft this year again. Since the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are an underlying basis for nuclear disarmament, Austria will also table this resolution again.

But, alas we have not seen progress during the last years towards nuclear disarmament. On the contrary, modernization programs are bringing new nuclear arms with higher qualitative standards, putting in question some thresholds that made it less likely that those weapons would ever be used.

For 20 years nothing has been negotiated on multilateral nuclear disarmament in the CD. This year relevant discussions have taken place in the Open-Ended Working Group. In this debate many states have highlighted the anomaly that other weapons of mass destruction are prohibited, but the most dangerous weapon of mass destruction, nuclear weapons, not. As disarmament history has shown, weapons are only eliminated after a legally-binding norm for their prohibition has been established. So more and more states came to the conclusion that such prohibition convention is needed and the relevant recommendation to start such negotiations next year found broad support. Therefore Austria together with Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, Nigeria, South Africa and presumably many additional countries will table a resolution to convene a conference in 2017, open to all States, international organizations and civil society, to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. A draft resolution to this effect, building on last year's resolution 70/33, has already been sent to all UN member states. Such a convention would be a core contribution towards the ultimate objective of a world free from nuclear weapons. It would constitute a basis on which the necessary system to ensure its complete and verified implementation could subsequently be established.

Many regions of the world are already nuclear weapon free zones today and individual states, among them Austria, have declared themselves nuclear weapon free. A prohibition treaty would create common standards. Clearly, it would strengthen the NPT in two decisive ways. It would bring a needed effective legal measure for the implementation of Article VI. And it

AUSTRIA



PERMANENT MISSION OF AUSTRIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

would strengthen the non-proliferation obligations of nuclear weapon free states that become state parties.

It was always clear that a legally-binding norm to prohibit nuclear weapons will be needed to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. So let us create this legal basis for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

Austria continues to be concerned about the civilian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas which have become the main reason for harm to civilians in many conflicts. Worryingly, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 92% of the casualties were civilians. Let me add that this humanitarian problem has repercussions far beyond the immediate zones of conflict. It is harm caused by explosive weapons which has driven most of today's refugees and internally displaced persons away from their war ridden homes.

The gravity of this issue was underscored by the attention it received at the World Humanitarian Summit last May in Istanbul. With the explicit support of the UN Secretary General, Austria and a number of other States as well as representatives from UN agencies, the ICRC and civil society, have started to look out for multilateral action on the issue. This afternoon, a meeting with other committed countries will start to discuss possible elements of an international political declaration on the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. From our point of view, strengthening the observance of existing international humanitarian law would be one of the important objectives of such a declaration. Austria is ready to engage with delegations who are interested to learn more and will host a side-event with the NGO-coalition INEW on that issue on 6 October in conference room 13.

Another matter of concern for my country is the prospect of the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems. Technological progress is fast and what seems futuristic today may be a reality tomorrow. The challenge is how to ensure that developments remain within ethical, political and legal imperatives. We welcome the broad discussions which were held on the occasion of a series of expert meetings in the framework of the Conventional Weapons Convention. We support the recommendation issued by the latest of those meetings that the forthcoming Review Conference of the Conventional Weapons Convention should establish a Group of Governmental Experts to further deepen and intensify international debate on the issue.

AUSTRIA



PERMANENT MISSION OF AUSTRIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Mr. Chairman,

Austria continues to pay special attention to the conventions on antipersonnel mines and cluster munitions. In a relatively short time span since entry into force, both conventions have brought huge benefits for affected countries and populations, and have made rapid progress towards universalisation. But a lot still remains to be done. In line with our continuing commitment, Austria has offered to take over the presidency of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in 2017.

The success story of these two conventions proves that multilateral efforts on disarmament actually can make a difference on the ground, even though they have been met with great resistance in the beginning. On this positive note I would like to conclude my remarks.