

# AUSTRIA



PERMANENT MISSION OF AUSTRIA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

"2017 Disarmament Commission"

"General Statement Austria"

delivered by

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Madam President,

Congratulations on your chairpersonship. We look forward to finalising our work for this cycle guided by your excellent leadership and that of the two working group chairs to allow the UNDC to live up to its mandate as set out in SSOD I, by building on the concrete progress achieved in other fora and to agree on concrete recommendation to be submitted to the General Assembly.

Madam President,

Austria remains fully committed to substantive progress in all relevant disarmament fora and especially in the GA under article 11 of the Charter. As you are aware, the deliberations on nuclear disarmament have gained significant momentum over the most recent years. Based on the outcome of the 2010 NPT review conference, the humanitarian initiative on the impact of and the risks associated with nuclear weapons has provided a set of arguments for urgent progress on nuclear disarmament and for moving away from a nuclear weapons-based security system. The "Humanitarian Pledge" builds upon these arguments and draws conclusions that should be drawn from the new evidence and formulates a different set of priorities. It stipulates that humanitarian concerns "should be at the centre of all deliberations, obligations and commitments with regard to nuclear disarmament". It underscores the importance of the "protection of civilians against risks stemming from nuclear weapons" and lists a number of "interim measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapon detonations". Finally, it highlights the urgent need to "identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons" (...) in light of the unacceptable humanitarian consequences and risks associated with nuclear weapons.

Building on the clear recommendations of last year's Open-Ended Working Group in Geneva, the General Assembly – with a 2/3 majority of states present and voting – adopted the resolution entitled "Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations." Through this resolution, the General Assembly decided to convene in 2017 a conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. This is a major breakthrough from the decades-long standstill of multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament and in long-overdue fulfilment of Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The first session of the negotiations just finished and showed a strong, united will to achieve a clear prohibition of nuclear weapons – and a strong sense of urgency. As our Vice-Minister Alexander Marschik put it last week in the General Assembly Hall during the High-Level Segment: "Waiting for disaster is not a strategy. That is disrespectful of the victims of nuclear weapons, past and future. There is a right time to begin the process of prohibiting nuclear weapons. That time is now." In that spirit we aspire to complete our negotiations on the basis of the chair's first draft in the upcoming June/July-session of the conference. Austria has been arguing for a strong, lean prohibition treaty. Details of our position can be found in our statements available on Papersmart.

This clear political will and urgency should also be reflected in the deliberations of the UNDC and the recommendations we are tasked to provide to the General Assembly. Extending the status quo or even accepting the strengthening of nuclear arsenals by modernisation is clearly unacceptable to the overwhelming majority of states. We look forward to constructive discussions to finish this session by agreeing a text that reflects our common desire of a world free of nuclear weapons and the expectations of populations from all around the globe.

We also look forward to constructive engagement in the upcoming NPT PrepCom in Vienna. Austria remains fully committed to the NPT as the *cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament in accordance with Article VI of the NPT and an important element in the further development of nuclear energy applications for peaceful purposes. Austria is committed to upholding and preserving the NPT as a key priority. Likewise my country continues to be a strong supporter of early commencement of negotiations on the FMCT. We look forward to the High-level FMCT Expert Preparatory Group delivering tangible results and to examining its report in the CD.*

Madam President,

Austria fully acknowledges the inalienable right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy as reflected in Article IV of the NPT. But in any case, this right ought to be executed applying the highest standards of safety, security, waste management and non-proliferation. Austrian constitutional law, however, prohibits not only nuclear weapons, but also facilities with the purpose of obtaining energy by nuclear fission. This is also reaffirmed in the Austrian government's commitment to our anti-nuclear power policy, taking into account the principle of free choice of energy mix. This paramount principle was reconfirmed in Resolution 66/288 endorsing the outcome document of the UN Conference of Sustainable Development, recognizing that the activities of countries in broader energy-related matters are of great importance and are prioritized according to their specific challenges, capacities and circumstances, including their energy mix. Against this backdrop, it is evident that any formulation that might be construed as promoting peaceful uses of nuclear energy for power generation in a generalized manner would be inconsistent with the aforementioned outcome reached at the highest political level. Moreover, as my delegation repeatedly stressed during the last triennial cycle, any discussions on this topic are to be conducted in the relevant fora, as set out by the General Assembly, notably in its Resolution 1145 (XII) pertaining to the relationship between the United Nations and the IAEA.

Madam President,

In the area of conventional weapons, we value the contribution that practical confidence-building measures can make to the maintenance and enhancement of regional and international peace and security. For this cycle we continue to recommend taking into consideration the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and in particular from the effects of the use of conventional weapons. Among this, the devastating effects

of the use of explosive weapons with wide area effect in populated areas are of particular concern. As the former Secretary-General reaffirmed in his most recent report on the protection of civilian, "when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 92 per cent of those reportedly killed or injured were civilians." Austria, together with like-minded countries and civil society continues to promote progress in this area. A further area of strong concern for Austria is lethal autonomous weapons ("LAWS") and their compatibility with international humanitarian law. We look forward to the report of the Group of Governmental Experts at the annual meeting of the Convention for Certain Conventional Weapons in November 2017.

As chair of the 16<sup>th</sup> Anti-Personal Mine Ban Convention's meeting of state parties, Austria is concerned about the sharp rise in the number of people killed in 2015. Our presidency priorities were announced in Santiago at the end of last year. They center on universalisation, victim assistance, mine clearance, stockpile destruction and making progress on budgetary issues.

We strongly welcome the improvements made to the UN Register on Conventional Arms, i.a. by including small arms and light weapons on a trial basis. We call on all states to report regularly to the register and to take advantage of help offered, if required.

Lastly, let me underline the importance Austria attaches to the landmark Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the convention prohibiting cluster munitions.

Madam President,

On working methods, as last year, we would advocate for an invitation to UNIDIR to provide relevant expertise – for example via video-link – as provided for in resolution 61/98. Furthermore taking into account the important and extremely useful contributions of civil society to disarmament in various fora, we would strongly encourage increased interaction to also come to UNDC. There are many ways to integrate this – for example by holding informal sessions in the format of interactive dialogues with relevant experts from academia, NGOs or other relevant institutions in order to deepen our knowledge and allow for proposals of possible bridging pathways to energise the work of the Commission – something that is very sorely missing.

Madam President,

In conclusion let me express once more my hope that the UNDC can overcome its deadlock, achieve concrete progress and issue recommendations as tasked through its mandate. We encourage you to continue to seek ways to improve working methods and enable more constructive and focused deliberations.

Thank you very much.