General Statement UNDC 2018

AUSTRIA

delivered by

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Madam President,

Congratulations on your chairpersonship. We look forward starting this new cycle guided by your excellent leadership and that of the two working group chairs to allow the UNDC build on our first agreement in nearly two decades last year and make progress in this cycle as well. It is up to us to live up to our mandate as set out in SSOD I and agree on concrete recommendations to be submitted to the General Assembly.

Madam President,

The past year may well be regarded as a turning point in disarmament – starting out with the first agreement at the UNDC in nearly 20 years – and culminating in the adoption of the Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons, with the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to ICAN. The new Treaty, based on the humanitarian initiative that came out of the 2010 NPT review conference, put humanitarian concerns at the centre, rather than abstract and intentionally undefined security concepts. The knowledge gained about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons through the humanitarian initiative led to a groundswell of political will to prohibit the final weapon of mass destruction.

Like the agreement in the UNDC, the Treaty is a historical break-through and ends 21 years of standstill in nuclear disarmament norm-setting since the adoption of the CTBT. The TPNW is well on its way to entry into force and the Austrian parliament has recently ratified the Treaty unanimously, which will allow us to deposit our instrument of ratification shortly. I take this opportunity to call on other states to sign and ratify the TPNW in order for it to enter into force soon.

Madam President,

At the same time, we have seen and condemned nuclear and missile tests by the DPRK in violation of Security Council resolutions. There is a real danger that the continued existence of nuclear weapons without credible progress towards their elimination and stressing that nuclear weapons are indispensable for the national security might lead countries in an exposed security situation to conclude that they, too, should get nuclear weapons.

We also bear witness to a deeply worrying reversal of attitudes towards nuclear disarmament in other quarters. Modernisation, upgrading and increased investment into nuclear weapons run directly counter to the professed will and, indeed, commitments taken to make progress on nuclear disarmament. New security doctrines have lowered
the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons and new, faster delivery systems dramatically reduce available reaction times, making miscalculation and mistakes that could risk the very survival of humanity far more likely. These dangers are further compounded by the threat of terrorism and new vulnerabilities to cyber attacks.

All of the above underlines that nuclear weapons and the constant danger they present cannot provide security. Not only is the logic behind the concept of mutual deterrence by mutually assured destruction fatally flawed, the incredible danger presented by the mere existence of these weapons – as evidenced by the many accidents and miscalculations of the past – has only increased in today’s world.

The prohibition Treaty makes a first, bold step towards reaching our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, taken by a large majority of UN member states. It does so in a manner fully supportive of and consistent with the existing multilateral nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. The TPNW complements the NPT – the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament - and contributes to the implementation of its Article VI. After all, it was always clear that without a legally binding prohibition norm Article VI cannot be fulfilled. Additional measures will be needed, as the Treaty makes clear. Indeed, the Treaty intentionally allows for various pathways – including on verification - in order to accommodate the different requirements of future nuclear disarmament processes.

Madame President,

This clear political will expressed by a large majority of states must also guide discussions in the UNDC and find its way into the recommendations we are tasked to provide to the General Assembly. In light of the dangerous and unacceptable developments regarding nuclear weapons, continuing the status quo simply won’t do for the overwhelming majority of states. We hope that unlike in past years, we will be able to agree a text that reflects our common desire of a world free of nuclear weapons, rejects new arms races and puts concerns about humanity – including the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons - at the centre.

Constructive deliberations and agreements here in New York can also help guide the upcoming negotiations at the NPT PrepCom in Geneva. 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. So my country continues to be a strong supporter of early
commencement of negotiations on the FMCT. We look forward to the results of the continued work of the High-level FMCT Expert Preparatory Group and hope for tangible results. In our view an FMCT - like the CTBT and TPNW - would establish an effective legal measure that is needed for the implementation of Article VI of the NPT.

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,

Austria fully aligns itself with the statement by the European Union on space aspects. Let me just add that Austria is strongly engaged in the space domain and is honoured to host the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs in Vienna. We hope that this cycle will lead to fruitful deliberations on this most important area and thank Australia for their working paper with first proposals, which we look forward to discussing.

Madam President,

Finally on working methods, as in past years, we continue to advocate for an invitation to UNIDIR to provide relevant expertise – for example via video-link – as provided for in resolution 61/98. Presentations by experts from academia, NGOs and international organisations have been a defining and extremely helpful feature throughout recent disarmament processes – from the SSOD IV-OEWG, to the PoA PrepCom, the High-
level FMCT Expert Preparatory Group and of course the negotiations leading to the TPNW. It is high time to open the UNDC for this most valuable input and make this important resource available to us. There are many models of integrating them into the UNDC. We would advocate for their continuous presence at deliberations, presentations to clarify matters related ongoing discussions at the discretion of the chair and the possibility to take the floor from time to time during deliberations, again at the discretion of the chair.

Madam President,

In conclusion, we look forward to building on the momentum of last year’s partial success and the current momentum in disarmament negotiations to achieve concrete progress in this year’s deliberations. We encourage you to continue to seek ways to improve working methods and enable more constructive and focused deliberations.

Thank you very much.