Statement by
H.E. Ambassador Gerhard Pfanzelter
Permanent Representative of Austria
at the First Committee
of the Fifty-Ninth General Assembly

Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons
Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition
of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of
Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction

2004 Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World

New York
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Mr. Chairman,

Austria fully aligns itself with the statement made the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union in the Thematic Debate on Conventional Weapons. I am taking the floor today to highlight the particular importance that my country attaches to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction. Austria belongs to the large group of co-sponsors of resolution L.40 introduced by Thailand. We are very pleased to note that the high number of co-sponsors of this resolution, again, is a visible expression not only of the success of the Convention itself but also of the strength of the international norm against anti-personnel landmines established by the Convention.

Anti-personnel mines are weapons that do not discriminate between combatants and innocent civilians. They cause terrible human suffering long after the end of armed conflicts and constitute a serious impediment to post conflict reconstruction and development. 138 states have acknowledged this and have outlawed the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of this terrible weapon. This is based on the recognition that it is only through the total elimination of this weapon that we can eventually solve this global scourge. We therefore strongly urge those states that have so far remained outside this Convention to re-evaluate their position and to join the growing broad consensus of the international community and accede to the Convention.

During the past five years, we have made a lot of progress towards the implementation of the Convention’s humanitarian, development and disarmament objectives. More than 37 millions of stockpiled mines have been destroyed. This means that the military in 126 States no longer possess this weapon. Trade in anti-personnel mines has virtually ceased and production as well as the use of this weapon is markedly reduced. Vast areas of mined land have been cleared and returned to civilians for productive use; survivors of landmine incidents have been assisted. Most importantly, the number of people who fall victim to landmines each year is much lower than a few years ago.

Nevertheless, anti-personnel mines continue to be used and still cause many thousands of new victims each year. Universalization remains a challenge. There are still large stockpiles of anti-personnel mines around the globe and very large mined areas that need to be cleared.

In short, Mr. Chairman, the Convention is working but more needs to be done.

Next month – from 29 November to 3 December 2004 --, the First Review Conference of the Convention will take place in Nairobi, Kenya. This Conference – now unofficially referred to as the 2004 Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World – will be the highest profile event on the landmines issue since the signing of the Convention in Ottawa in 1997. Austria is very honoured to have been designated – in the person of Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch – to preside over this important event.
The substantive preparations for the Nairobi Summit have gone very well. Two formal Preparatory Meetings have taken place in Geneva as well as many informal meetings and consultations. There is a lot of interest in the preparations, as shown by the active participation during these meetings and the wealth of input provided by the States Parties, the UN-system, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and others. Let me also mention and thank the organizers of the regional meetings that have taken place all around the globe during the past ten months, in Burkina Faso, Romania, Lithuania, Ecuador, Jordan, Thailand, Kenya, Tajikistan and Ethiopia. These meetings – most of them held in mine-affected regions - have provided invaluable input into the preparations for the Nairobi Summit and have contributed a great deal to raising awareness for this important event.

However, the substantive preparations are only one – albeit very important – aspect of the Nairobi Summit. Equally important for all of us, involved in the landmine issue, is the fact that Nairobi will be the opportunity to achieve 5 main objectives:

1) Bring the landmines issue back into public consciousness
2) Renew and reinforce political and resource commitments to successfully implement the Convention
3) Reiterate our responsibility to clear mined areas and assist victims
4) Establish a comprehensive and concrete Plan of Action for the next 5 years
5) Increase worldwide acceptance of the Convention

The Nairobi Summit therefore is about recommitting ourselves, both politically and financially, to truly resolve the landmine-issue. And, this message needs to come primarily from the affected countries. It is of particular importance that mine-affected states are represented in Nairobi at the highest possible level during the high-level segment on 2 and 3 December 2004.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, let me reiterate that the expectations for the Nairobi Summit are very high. However, the success of the Nairobi Summit and, indeed of the whole Convention, will be measured in the renewed commitment to solving the problem of anti-personnel mines in the coming years. This is a real challenge for the next few years but it can be done if we continue to work in the same spirit of partnership that has so far characterised this remarkable process.

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