63. Session of the General Assembly

First Committee Cluster "Nuclear weapons"

Statement by Ambassador Alexander MARSCHIK
Representative of Austria

New York, 15 October 2008;
Mr. Chairman,

Let me congratulate you on the assumption of your office and your excellent work as chairman of this Committee. Let me also congratulate the other members of the Bureau, Micronesia, Croatia and Portugal.

Austria fully supports the statement of the EU-Presidency.

In addition, Austria would like to stress a couple of points it deems particularly relevant.

1. CTBT

In our global discourse on international security nuclear tests are a deliberate threat. 20 years after the end of the Cold War the language of nuclear threats is obsolete; it is not the way states should converse today or in the future. Nevertheless, suspicions and mistrust have nurtured fears of a global nuclear arms race. It is therefore all the more important that the CTBT enters into force soon.

In line with our commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation, Austria jointly with Costa Rica assumed the Presidency of the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT (Art. XIV-Conference) in 2007. In this capacity we continue raising awareness about the CTBT and the benefits of scientific civil applications of its International Monitoring System such as tsunami warnings, monitoring of earthquakes and volcanoes or research on the earth’s core and oceans for the benefit of mankind. Austria sponsored several CTBTO Workshops and Conferences, such as for Caribbean and Pacific States to explain the many advantages of CTBT membership.

On September 24, 2008, Austria together with other countries organized a Ministerial Conference in support of the CTBT in New York. With almost 100 states participating the success of this Conference which was also attended by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as well as former US Defence Secretary William Perry reflected a positive dynamic towards universalisation of the treaty. Austria urges all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty without delay and particularly calls upon the Annex-II states to show leadership in this regard.

2. NPT and IAEA

The last decade has seen some setbacks in the field of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. The recent decision of the Nuclear Suppliers Group regarding an exemption for a Non-NPT member state from NSG export control guidelines has raised legitimate questions as to whether the international community still accords the Treaty the same priority as it did a decade ago.

Austria is convinced that the NPT remains the foundation and cornerstone of the international non-proliferation architecture. However, serious efforts of all
UN Member States are now all the more needed to overcome the divergences which have paralyzed the international regime particularly since the NPT Review Conference in 2005. We need visible progress in nuclear disarmament. We need visible success in nuclear non-proliferation.

In this context Austria expresses its appreciation for the dedicated work of the IAEA. It serves as a forum for debate, a centre of technical expertise and, most importantly, as an indispensable institution for monitoring and verification within the global security architecture.

It must be the international community's utmost priority to cope with non-proliferation challenges, in particular by strengthening and universally implementing the Agency's safeguards system, including the Additional Protocol, by implementing and further developing the most stringent security and safety tools, and by advancing the multilateralization of the nuclear fuel cycle.

3. Nuclear Fuel Cycle

On the latter topic - the multilateralization of the nuclear fuel cycle - Austria has actively participated in the respective discussions in the IAEA, the NPT PrepCom, as well as the UN Disarmament Commission.

We have presented a proposal to create a new multilateral framework for nuclear energy that over time would include converting enrichment and reprocessing facilities from national to multilateral operations. In our view there should not be a differentiation in "haves" and "have-nots", only in "wants" and "want-nots". For those states that opt for nuclear energy, access to nuclear fuel should be a strictly regulated but impartial and fair undertaking.

This is of course a long-term vision which requires a step-by-step approach. The creation of an international fuel reserve under the auspices of the Agency could be such a first step. Austria will continue to contribute to the multilateralization debate and intends to present a more detailed outline of its proposal in the IAEA's appropriate fora in the near future.

4. HCOC/ballistic missile proliferation

The threat posed by weapons of mass destruction rises exponentially with the development of advanced delivery systems. Let me recall, that until we have successfully established a multilateral missile control arrangement within the United Nations the "Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation" of 2002 serves as the only multilateral instrument for verification against the proliferation of ballistic missiles.
Austria serves as the Executive Secretariat of the Code and has so far hosted six Meetings of the Subscribing States. More than two-thirds of UN member states already subscribed to the Code and I hope that more will join.

It is paramount, however, that all Subscribing States demonstrate their commitment and contribute positively to all aspects of this confidence building instrument.

In this respect let me thank the Netherlands for hosting an informative lunch today at which many colleagues participated. This is also a sign of growing interest in the Code and I hope that this interest will also be reflected in wide support for this year’s resolution on the HCoC.

Thank you.