Statement
by
Ambassador Thomas Hajnoczi
Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations in Geneva
at the
Thematic Discussion on Nuclear Weapons of the First Committee

New York, 21 October 2013
Mr. Chairman,

Austria associates herself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. In our general statement, my delegation has already raised various aspects of importance for Austria in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. In addition, I would like to highlight the following points.

At the High-level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament of the General Assembly, on 26 September 2013, the Federal President of Austria, H.E. Heinz Fischer, recalled the words of the former US President Kennedy and stated that "nuclear weapons must be abolished before they abolish us". A nuclear weapons detonation could happen anytime, be it intentionally or accidentally. And as the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons increases, so does the risk of their use. Like many other high-level speakers during that debate, the Austrian Federal President emphasized that nuclear weapons bear an unacceptable risk to humanity due to the risk of devastating humanitarian consequences.

Nuclear weapons must be addressed globally, from the perspective of their impact on humanity in terms of their security, economic, environmental and developmental impact. The international Conference in Oslo in March 2013 demonstrated that a nuclear weapon detonation today would cause a humanitarian emergency that would by far exceed the capabilities of any State or international body to provide adequate assistance. This raises serious questions for the responsibility of states vis-à-vis their citizens. Furthermore, also the long-term effects of a nuclear weapon detonation on a regional and global scale need to be addressed. Austria welcomes the announcement by Mexico to host a Conference in February 2014 that will look closer into this issue.

Mr. Chairman,

A world without nuclear weapons is a goal shared by the international community. Still, as the Austrian Federal President has noted, our efforts so far to eliminate these weapons have been too modest in ambition and too limited in success.

A statement to be delivered to this debate by New Zealand on behalf of a majority of the UN membership, including Austria, emphasizes that all efforts must be exerted to eliminate the threat of nuclear weapons.
Austria is pleased that, since last year, the General Assembly has addressed multilateral nuclear disarmament with a renewed sense of urgency and stepped up its efforts under its own responsibility for global peace and security.

One remarkable initiative in this regard was the work carried out by the Open-ended Working Group to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons. The Open-ended Working Group underlined the urgency of making progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons; clearly recognized the shared responsibility of all states, as well as the role that international and regional organisations, people's representatives, academia and NGOs play in this process; and proved that substantive work in this field can be carried out in a constructive, open and inclusive manner. This needs to multiply within the broader multilateral disarmament environment. The Group adopted a report by consensus that takes a closer look at the various legal and policy elements needed for achieving and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons and as such could serve as an important tool for assisting future work in this area.

We now encourage States, UN entities, international organizations and civil society representatives to build upon the work undertaken by the Open-ended Working Group. We are confident that draft resolution L.34 submitted by Costa Rica as a follow-up to the work of the Open-ended Working Group will enjoy the broad support by member States.

It is our collective responsibility to keep nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation high on the political agenda, to fully utilize the international institutions and instruments that we have established and to act with urgency in order to make progress towards our collective goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is a key instrument in this regard. The NPT commitments, including the 2010 Action Plan, if implemented credibly, would put us on the right track to achieve a world without nuclear weapons and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. However, we reiterate our concern about the lack of implementation of a number of nuclear disarmament commitments under the NPT. We will have to step up our efforts to address the serious challenges that the NPT is facing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.