UNGA First Committee 2015

Cluster Disarmament Machinery

Austrian Statement

Ambassador Alexander Kmentt

New York, 27 October 2015

Check against delivery
Mr Chairman,

Austria aligns herself with the statement delivered by the European Union.

Austria places utmost importance to an effective and well functioning multilateral system to address the crucial disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation challenges that the international community faces. Looking at the existing fora, it is easy to find many flaws, which prevent us from making progress on these key issues. The biggest flaw, however, is not the disarmament machinery’s fault. It is the lack of political will for progress in multilateral disarmament efforts among different actors that remains the key concern.

The problem with the existing multilateral disarmament machinery is that it is tilted towards those States that have the most rigid approaches and that are enabled to prevent the overwhelming majority of States to move forward on key priorities. This applies most prominently to nuclear weapons issues but also to several other important areas on our agenda.

The lack of political will has - after 17 years of dysfunction - so profoundly undermined the Conference on Disarmament that, it seems difficult to imagine that this forum can regain its former relevance of negotiating key disarmament treaties. This is exacerbated by its restricted membership and consequent democratic legitimacy deficit as well as rules of procedure that can only be described as anachronistic in the 21st century. While Austria participated in the informal discussions and the schedule of activities, these are no substitute, in our mind, to the CD fulfilling its mandate. We should not create a false impression of activity or of the CD fulfilling its mandate.

The UN Disarmament Commission finds itself in a similar predicament. It was striking for us to see that even the most watered down recommendations in the previous triennial cycle did not manage to get adopted by consensus. We welcome any suggestions to bring the UNDC forum back to an effective functioning. However, we recognize that in the current situation this call may be just a futile as calling for the CD to adopt a programme of work.

Mr Chairman,

In light of challenges mentioned above, the work of the UN General Assembly is therefore particularly important. This is the highest forum of the United Nations where all States are represented and where all voices can be heard. In the GA, we can demonstrate what the overwhelming majority of States sees as priorities and we can take decisions to advance the disarmament agenda. One such decision can be taken at this year’s session, in the form of establishing an open-ended-working group to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. Austria hopes that member States will capitalise on the opportunity to create such a body that would allow all States to engage on nuclear disarmament issues without the procedural set up that stifles progress in other fora of the UN disarmament machinery. We would
like to invite all States to support the relevant resolution tabled by Mexico of which Austria is a co-sponsor.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, Austria would like to put on record its support for the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). UNIDIR is currently in a difficult financial situation and a lack of predictable funding. In Austria's view, UNIDIR has for decades provided a crucial service and contribution to the international community with its broad range of independent research on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation issues. We deem it important that this First Committee takes action to ensure UNIDIR's continued effective functioning and — foremost of all — financial sustainability for the future.

Thank you.