Statement

Thematic discussion on Conventional Weapons

AUSTRIA

delivered by

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Mr. Chairman,

Austria aligns herself with the statement delivered by the European Union. Allow me to add some additional points of particular importance for my country.

The last 2 decades have brought remarkable success in the area of conventional weapons disarmament. From the impressive progress made towards freeing the world from anti-personnel mines to the adoption of legal instruments, spanning cluster munitions to the trade in arms, the international community has achieved what many saw as long-term – if not unrealistic – aspirations. We need to keep up the momentum and push towards full implementation of existing instruments, as well as to keep our eyes open to face emerging challenges arising from S&T developments and changes in warfare.

By putting the protection of civilians at the centre, the APMBC has ever since fundamentally changed how we perceive disarmament and its humanitarian benefits. Secretary General Antonio Guterres calls for “disarmament that actually saves lives”. The APMBC is outstanding in this regard: With 162 member states and more than 49 million mines destroyed, 10,000 lives saved, the norm against anti-personnel mines is firmly established. We are strongly concerned about reports of recent use in Myanmar – which is not a state party, of course. As the President of the Convention I have asked the government of Myanmar to clarify the situation and consider an independent fact-finding mission with international participation into this matter.

Despite the successes, there are worrying trends, such as a decade high number of causalities in 2016 – most of them due to the strongly increasing use of improvised devices. But it is worthwhile to remember that the success of the APMBC rests on a fragile cooperation between states, civil society and international organisations.

In the year of its 20th anniversary Austria wants to use its presidency of the Convention to re-energise the international community in order to meet the 2025 goal for a world free of anti-personal mines.

Austria together with the next and previous presidencies Afghanistan and Chile has tabled the traditional draft resolution on the implementation of the convention. We invite all States to support the draft resolution.

Mr. Chairman,

Multiple source data clearly demonstrates the devastating impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas ("EWIPA") on civilian populations, both short and long-term. In
2016, more than 32,000 civilians were killed or injured by explosive weapons – while the use of EWIPA leads to civilian casualty rates of more than 90%. Most of today’s refugees and internally displaced populations have been forced to flee due to the humanitarian impact of these weapons and the devastation they cause. The awareness of the indiscriminate effects of EWIPA has led to renewed international attention, and we welcome that it is now increasingly being discussed in relevant fora such as the CCW.

The previous and current United Nations Secretary Generals have encouraged all States to engage and proposed the elaboration of a political declaration. It is our moral obligation to raise awareness on this matter of grave concern and to strengthen the observance of existing international humanitarian law. My country will together with like-minded countries, as well as representatives from UN agencies, the ICRC and civil society, to explore a multilateral way forward. Following a recent meeting in Geneva hosted by the ICRC, Austria hosts a side-event today at 1:15 in CR A to update on progress and engage with interested delegations and civil society.

As a State Party to Protocol III of the CCW we are strongly concerned about the negative humanitarian impact of both, airdropped and ground-launched incendiary weapons by any actor. We hope that in the CCW November meetings the opportunity is seized to assess the current status of implementation of the Protocol to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

While the Cluster Munitions Convention is making good progress in fostering implementation, Austria is concerned about the ongoing use of cluster munitions outlawed by the Convention particularly in the conflict in Yemen. The disturbing reports show the high civilian casualties resulting from their use. Austria calls on all States to stop using cluster munitions and to join the Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

The 3rd Conference of States Parties has been an opportunity to discuss the further development of the Arms Trade Treaty. We note the constructive and critical role of civil society and the involvement of industry that will be crucial in implementing the letter and the spirit of ATT. What is needed in our view is to further explore in which way the ATT can contribute to reduce human suffering caused by arms in so many countries of this world. Also we should look what ATT implementation could contribute towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. 2018 will also be an opportunity to continue making progress in tackling the diversion, illicit trade and unauthorised use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) during next year’s review conference of the UN Programme of Action (UN PoA) on SALW.
Mr. Chairman,

Let me close with an appeal: We have made impressive progress over the past 20 years through a network of ground-breaking treaties. Looking at the progress achieved, and as science and technology advances it is important to ensure that the instruments that the international community has put in place continue to meet their objectives and keep their relevance. We cannot turn a blind eye to scientific progress. Therefore my country considers that action on emerging military technologies is urgently needed. We regret that we have lost precious time as half of the GGE on LAWS had to be cancelled. We need a sound financial basis and we are all called upon to honour our financial obligations in a timely manner. We are looking forward to discussions in November to sure that the application of such new technologies is consistent with ethical, political and legal imperatives.

Thank you.