Nuclear Weapons

Statement by Austria

During the Cold War, the existence of nuclear weapons brought us to the brink of ultimate annihilation. And today, developments in technology and geopolitical challenges make nuclear weapons even more dangerous than ever. Disarmament efforts have slowed down and confidence-building measures have been eroding. Nuclear weapon possessor States have entered a new cycle of modernizing, investing billions of dollars into upgrading their arsenals and making nuclear weapons of reduced size and weight easier to deliver. Decision-making time is further shortened while nuclear weapons remain on high alert and central to strategic defence planning.

The overwhelming majority of the UN membership engaged in the humanitarian initiative and made it clear: The risks and humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons make the standstill in nuclear disarmament and persistent lack of fulfilment of Article VI of the NPT unacceptable.

We are tabling the draft resolution on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons again during this session with our traditional partners. The draft resolution only contains technical changes in comparison with its predecessor and we hope for your co-sponsorship and support.

Chairperson,

Unlike the standstill in nuclear disarmament, the risks inherent in these abhorrent weapons systems continue to increase with technological developments from cyber threats, terrorism and faster delivery systems, to mention but a few. As the Secretary General points out in his important disarmament agenda “Securing our common future”, there is a widespread perception that progress towards nuclear disarmament has stalled and there are troubling signs that the nuclear agenda is now moving in the wrong direction.

These developments have contributed to galvanising a majority of UN member States towards demanding concrete progress on nuclear disarmament and to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. To quote the Secretary General once more, the TPNW is a historic instrument, which will form an important component of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime when it enters into force, and enable States that so choose to subscribe to some of the highest available multilateral norms against nuclear weapons. Indeed the TPNW has closed a legal gap by establishing a comprehensive legal norm for the prohibition of nuclear weapons. This places nuclear weapons in the same category as other weapons of mass destruction, which are unconditionally outlawed for constituting fundamentally unacceptable means of warfare. It now forms part of the established international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime.

The TPNW reaffirms the NPT’s role as the cornerstone of this regime. It fosters NPT implementation, in particular as it stipulates progress towards the achievement of a nuclear weapon free world in accordance with Article VI. The TPNW strengthens nuclear non-proliferation and the IAEA safeguards system. Here, it goes even beyond the NPT provisions:
Firstly, it obliges States Parties to maintain, at a minimum, their existing IAEA safeguards standards, while at the same time encouraging them to strive towards a higher standard.

Secondly, the TPNW – unlike the NPT - obliges States Parties that possess nuclear weapons to directly negotiate, conclude and maintain an adequate safeguards agreement. This is a major advancement over the NPT, where Nuclear Weapon States' stockpiles are not subject to any safeguards.

The TPNW also strengthens the global norm against nuclear testing. This was demonstrated most recently by one State ratifying the CTBT and the TPNW at the same time. The CTBT is a key instrument of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We call on all remaining States, and especially the Annex II States, to sign and ratify the CTBT. The entry into force of the CTBT is of utmost importance.

As to the TPNW, we warmly welcome the most recent ratifications and signatures. The Treaty is swiftly progressing towards entry into force, faster than all other WMD treaties to date. Austria calls on all States which have not yet done so to sign and ratify the TPNW as soon as possible and to join efforts for its universalization.

The TPNW is an indispensable step on the path towards a world without nuclear weapons. Without such a prohibition norm, how would it be possible to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons? But let us be clear, further legal and practical measures are required to achieve and maintain a world free of nuclear weapons. The TPNW is only the first step, but an essential one.

We are introducing together with ...the resolution “Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons” this year, as announced in last year’s “Taking Forward Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations” resolution. The short and technical resolution resembles the familiar resolutions dedicated to other disarmament treaties. We ask for your co-sponsorship and support for the resolution.

Chairperson,

All States share the objective of a world without nuclear weapons. While we welcome all steps that have been taken by nuclear weapon states on reductions, changes in nuclear doctrines and transparency measures, we are very worried by the current standstill with regard to any of such measures, and the indications of even a possible reversal of the positive past-Cold War developments. **We are alarmed by the announcement that the INF could be ended. This would trigger a new arms race.** In this context, we also call on the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New Start Treaty and negotiate in a timely manner a follow up instrument. We cannot accept the argument that it would be due to a lack of the right conditions that nuclear disarmament would not be able to progress. It was exactly at the height of the Cold War when significant nuclear disarmament measures were adopted and contributed importantly to relax tensions. Disarmament measures constitute a decisive positive factor for improving the international political situation.

Furthermore, the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament drives the risk of further proliferation. The continued possession of nuclear weapons by some States is a strong incentive for some others to strive for them too.
Chairperson,

The existence of the DPRK’s nuclear and missile programmes are of grave concern to the international community. It is central that the DPRK return to compliance with its international obligations under UN Security Council resolutions, the NPT and IAEA and ratify the CTBT without delay. We welcome the recent high-level efforts and encourage all parties concerned to continue build trust and agree on the path towards a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the DPRK.

The JCPOA is critical for reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and globally. We therefore deeply regret the withdrawal of the United States. We call on Iran to abide by its obligations, as Teheran has been doing so far according to the judgment of the IAEA. We reiterate our commitment to work with the international community to preserve the nuclear deal.

Nuclear weapon free zones are an important means to reinforce the nuclear non-proliferation regime and contribute to nuclear disarmament. We reiterate our support for the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems in the Middle East.

Chairperson,

We don’t inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children. An essential part of our responsibility is related to disarmament education, which is crucial in order to share with our next generations the experience and tools that empower them to engage themselves in a well-informed and critical discourse on the role of nuclear disarmament for peace, security and development.

I thank you.