74th United Nations General Assembly
First Committee

Nuclear Weapons

Statement delivered by

H.E. Thomas Hajnoczi

Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, Vienna

New York, October 22, 2019

Check against delivery
Mr. Chairman,

We have already laid out our principal concerns and positions in the general statement. In the interest of time, let me only add the following details:

In the nearly seventy-five years since the first deployment of nuclear weapons, we have seen clear and undisputable evidence of their catastrophic humanitarian consequences and unacceptable risks posed by their existence. The three conferences of the Humanitarian Initiative underscored this fact. In light of this knowledge, global nuclear disarmament should be a self-evident and universal goal – and indeed all states have endorsed it. Yet still today, possessor states present these weapons as inevitable and essential for their security and even improve and modernise their stockpiles for decades to come. It is high time for the actions of possessor states to match their commitments. Geopolitical developments cannot be an excuse for inaction on nuclear disarmament.

We call on Possessor states to immediately halt their nuclear modernisation and upgrading programmes, as well as the development of new types of nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Past achievements, such as the INF treaty, as well as the continuous reduction of arsenals under the START and New START treaties must be preserved and – in the case of START – extended and continued through ambitious successor agreements. It is essential that no ground-based medium range missiles are re-stationed in Europe.

The CTBT entry into force is long overdue, and I call on all Annex-II countries to walk the talk and ratify the treaty. We should also make use of the excellent work and expertise of the CTBTO in the urgent denuclearisation of the DPRK. Non-proliferation must be continuously strengthened. We regret the developments around the JCPOA and hope that it can be preserved.

To mitigate the inherent risks of nuclear weapons, a wide variety of interim measures must be urgently taken, from de-alerting to risk reduction and the removal of nuclear weapons from military doctrines, among others. Indeed proclaiming that nuclear weapons are necessary for the security of nuclear armed states is a powerful driver of nuclear proliferation and therefore goes directly against the goals and intentions of the NPT.

As we near the 2020 NPT Review Conference, it is more urgent than ever to make concrete progress. The 2010 Action Plan lays out many of these steps and the nuclear
weapons states have committed to their implementation. The NPT, the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, is only as strong as its members’ adherence to it. The 2020 Review Conference should live up to its mandate, review the implementation of these commitments and obligations and lead us on the way ahead. So it is more urgent than ever to make concrete progress to showcase next year. We are grateful for the many initiatives that aim to facilitate concrete progress and we hope they will lead to tangible results at the RevCon. We look forward to working with you towards a successful and ambitious outcome in 2020.

Austria, as an ardent and unwavering supporter of the NPT contributed to its implementation by helping to bring about the historic Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons. Just as its non-proliferation and peaceful uses pillars require further agreements to implement the NPT, the disarmament pillar inevitably needs a prohibition to achieve the treaty’s goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. The TPNW is not only fully compatible with the NPT but a necessary element for its implementation. 122 countries sent a clear signal of their commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons by voting in favour of the TPNW’s adoption. Already 79 countries have signed and 33 – including Austria – have ratified it. We especially welcome Dominica’s ratification this past Friday. We call on all remaining countries to sign and ratify the TPNW.

In the meantime, we warmly invite you to co-sponsor and vote in favour of the two resolutions Austria and our fellow main sponsors are tabling again this year – that is L. 12 entitled “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons” and L. 13 entitled “Humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons”. The resolutions have only been technically updated.

I finish, Mr. Chairman, with a strong appeal to make use of our multilateral system. Nuclear weapons cannot be contained by national borders. They are a problem that concerns the safety of every single one of us – and all of us – we all have a say in their disarmament. Let us make use of this important forum and the upcoming NPT RevCon to demonstrate our commitment to the common goal of eliminating this last category of weapons of mass destruction once and for all.

Thank you.