74th United Nations General Assembly
First Committee

Conventional Weapons

AUSTRIA

delivered by

H.E. Thomas Hajnoczi

Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, Vienna

New York, October 24, 2019

Check against delivery
Mr Chair,

Austria fully aligns itself with the Statement delivered by the European Union. Additionally, in our national capacity and due to time constraint we wish to focus on two issues of particular importance. The full version of this statement will be made available on papersmart.

This year the international community celebrates the 70th Anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Respect for international law is the backbone of multilateralism. Over the past decades the international community has developed the rules of international humanitarian law, which seeks to limit the effects of armed conflict in particular on civilians. To create a safer world for all it is essential to uphold and fully implement the instruments and mechanisms, and in this context especially IHL.

First, the increasing urbanization of conflict is a major challenge for the protection of civilians. It is well documented that when explosive weapons with wide area effects are used in populated areas, more than 90% of the victims are civilians. This is a call for action.

Austria hosted the Vienna Conference on Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare earlier this month. We are heartened by the interest of so many states in advancing the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons with wide area effect in populated areas. The broad participation of 133 States from all regions and many international organisations and civil society is encouraging – particularly in times when multilateralism and international cooperation has come under strain.

Strengthening observance of IHL requires political will, if we indeed intend to see changes on the ground. Austria welcomes the recently issued Joint Appeal on the use of explosive weapons in cities by the United Nations Secretary General and the President of the ICRC, outlining the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare and we thank them for their explicit support for efforts of States to develop a political declaration. Austria encourages all States to take part in the process of the elaboration of the political declaration starting 18 November in Geneva.
Second, the weaponization of artificial intelligence poses fundamental challenges to a broad range of weapons categories. It is a legal, ethical and moral imperative that humans must remain in control of armed conflict and the weapons that are deployed and used.

We believe it is not only a responsibility or obligation, but also in our shared security interest to regulate the issue of lethal autonomous weapons systems before we are overtaken by facts on the ground. Therefore, Austria fully supports the immediate start of negotiations of a legally binding instrument to ensure meaningful human control over selecting and engaging targets. As more and more political leaders voice their commitment that humans must remain in control over life and death, the GGE on LAWS should step up its efforts in order to allow the international community to implement this political will. Austria believes that it will be key for the success of the GGE LAWS to focus and advance on the issue of human control.

Finally, Mr. Chair, allow me to reiterate that Austria remains firmly committed to the Anti-Personal Mine Ban Convention Review Conference and is looking forward to the 4th Review Conference in Oslo. This conference is an important step towards a world free of anti-personnel mines. Austria remains a strong supporter of the ATT and the CCM, and will continue to work towards their full implementation and universalisation.

I thank you.