Open Ended Working Group on Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations

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Panel II on transparency measures related to the risks associated with existing nuclear weapons

Statement by Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations in Geneva
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Thank you Mr. Chair,

First of all, I want to thank H.E. Mr. Piet de Klerk for his presentation on the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, which has the potential to become an important transparency measure between Nuclear and non-Nuclear Weapon States.

In our view, it is crucial to achieve a greater degree of transparency regarding all aspects of nuclear forces. We therefore welcome that the OEWG is also a forum for an engagement on transparency measures. Transparency is needed not only for States, but for an informed public debate on nuclear policies to be able to take place. We also believe that this is an area where a large degree of convergence between delegations should be possible to achieve.

Austria supports the Japanese proposal in WP 22 to set up a reporting mechanism for nuclear weapon states. We agree with Sweden that highlighted the importance of the IMS of the CTBTO and would like to see a recommendation to States that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the CTBT.

Today we are also considering the lack of transparency on the part of nuclear weapon states about their safety records. Currently not enough is being known or verified about the recent safety records of nuclear weapons, especially as most
seem very reluctant to place this information in the public domain. Such a lack of transparency is not reassuring.

As already stated yesterday, it is the view and recommendation of my delegation that the burden of proof for demonstrating in a transparent manner that nuclear weapons control systems are as safe as possible needs to shift to those who possess them and claim that they can be managed safely.

We therefore endorse requests for more transparency directed to all nuclear-armed states and would like to put forward calls for specific transparency measures which we would like to see reflected in the recommendations of the final report. These five measures refer to:

(1) the record of system breakdowns and accidents of nuclear weapons system,

(2) the design basis for threat assumptions of catastrophic, unplanned or force of nature events with regard to nuclear weapons safety and security,

(3) the fail-safe mechanisms for dealing with false alarms and safety system failures, as well as back-up systems and their reliability under stress conditions,

(4) the scenarios that have been considered for regional global food security, human health, psychological and critical infrastructure implications of any detonation and

(5) finally, the public education efforts have been undertaken with regards to the dangers and risks of nuclear weapons.

Another central aspect regarding the lack of transparency is that it tends to fuel uncertainty, suspicion, exaggerations and mistrust between the nuclear armed states themselves – reactions that cause them to shape the nuclear forces and strategies in ways that further undermine security for all and does not lend credibility to those claims that say that nuclear deterrence is safe or sustainable. We will come back to this issue in another panel next week. But transparency is also essential for the trust between nuclear armed states and non-nuclear armed states.
This brings me to the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. I would have the following questions:

(1) Which countries are currently members of this initiative? We were looking at the website where a lot of information was provided, but not which countries are currently involved. More information on this would be helpful, especially since an initiative aiming at more transparency should be transparent.

(2) Closely linked with the first question, I would also be interested in the ratio between nuclear weapon states and umbrella states on the one hand and non-nuclear weapons states on the other hand?

(3) Do you envisage enlargement both with regard to nuclear possessor states as well as non-nuclear weapon states?

(4) What are the criteria to take part in this initiative?

(5) Do you also cover modernization programmes, because it seems that some of the modernization projects could have particularly destabilizing effects? How do you reconcile modernization programmes with professed political will to taking forward nuclear disarmament and reaching the so-called minimalization point?

I thank you.