Mr. Chair,

Aligned with the EU Statement, Austria wants to underline that Article VI of the NPT and the associated preambular paragraphs establish a clear obligation for nuclear disarmament with the finality of a nuclear weapon free world. The Review Conference in 2000 agreed and the Conference in 2010 reaffirmed that there is an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The thirteen practical steps towards nuclear disarmament of 2000, as well as the disarmament related parts of the Action Plan of 2010, detail agreed concrete actions to implement this obligation and to proceed towards this ultimate goal. At Review Conferences all States Parties have to measure progress in the fulfilment of these commitments.

Austria highly welcomes the fact that in February, the United States of America and the Russian Federation have achieved full implementation of the new START agreement. My country is on record of acknowledging the considerable reductions of nuclear war heads since the 80s and does hope for an extension of this treaty as a first step towards further reductions. Other current encouraging examples include the establishment of a group of governmental experts on nuclear disarmament verification, and of a high level preparatory group for the negotiations of a fissile material cut-off treaty. The most momentous recent positive development is, of course, the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons in 2017 which stands out as the first tangible result of multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations since the adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. It was always clear that a legally binding norm to prohibit nuclear weapons is indispensable for the implementation of Art. VI of the NPT. The TPNW as the CTBT and hopefully soon also a FMCT constitute effective legal measures that are called for on the path to the implementation of Article VI.

Mr. Chair,

Today, fifty years after the NPT established the goal of a nuclear weapon free world in international treaty law, still about fifteen thousand nuclear weapons are in existence. This horrifying arsenal is sufficient to extinguish humanity several times over. Disturbingly, signs are currently accumulating that instead of moving closer to accomplishing the “elimination from national arsenals of nuclear weapons” as prescribed by the NPT, we might be actually drifting away from this objective.

On the diplomatic front, we have recently observed attempts to backtrack on some of the fundamental disarmament obligations and commitments taken in the NPT framework. Should we start to roll back in this regard, the whole arms control, disarmament and non-
proliferation architecture could be destroyed, opening up for an unbridled arms race threatening the security of all of us. The way we all honour our own commitments, has a strong bearing on the credibility and authority of the NPT. Citing our overarching common objective of a nuclear weapon free world cannot be a mere lip service, all of us have to show in deeds that we are making progress in the implementation of the NPT in its entirety, including the elements thereof related to nuclear disarmament.

The Review Conference of 2010 recognized “the legitimate interests of non-nuclear-weapon States in the constraining by the nuclear-weapon States of the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons and ending the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons.” What we see today instead are costly and long-term programs of modernization of nuclear arsenals in virtually all nuclear weapon States running directly counter to this agreed language. Some of these programs serve the explicit purpose to acquire nuclear weapons which would be more usable than the ICBMs with large yield warheads currently prevailing in the arsenals. The intention is to broaden the options for a possible use. This is not only problematic as it nurtures the dangerous illusion of a possibility to wage, manage and ultimately win a so-called limited nuclear war. It also runs directly counter to action 5 of the NPT 2010 action plan speaking about “further diminishing the role and significance of nuclear weapons in all military and security concepts, doctrines and policies.” So we call on the States concerned to urgently reconsider their current nuclear weapon modernization programs and doctrines with a view to restoring compliance of their policies with existing commitments undertaken in the NPT framework.

A last example refers to the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty which features prominently in both the 2000 and 2010 final documents. The recent nuclear weapon tests by the DPRK which we have condemned so strongly should motivate us to redouble our commitment to bring the CTBT finally into force. We therefore urge all States which have not yet done so, and in particular those listed in the famous annex II, five of which are NPT States parties, to accede to that treaty as soon as possible.

Mr. Chair,

There is consensus that progress on nuclear disarmament has been insufficient and unsatisfactory. In order to be able to do better in the future, it is inevitable to criticize the nuclear weapon States for their omissions, as well as for certain activities which are inconsistent with their obligations and commitments in the NPT framework. But criticism alone will not improve the situation.

In addition, we all together should make an attempt to understand why there has not been better progress so far. One of the factors is certainly a particular security dilemma which is peculiar to the nuclear weapon States. Nuclear weapons are portrayed by them as indispensable for their national security. At the same time, they understand that nuclear weapons also represent a grave threat to their security. By stressing the importance of nuclear weapon for them they funnel proliferation. It is a key question therefore whether on balance nuclear weapons actually enhance anybody’s security, or rather undermine it. The issue should be discussed further, taking account of all relevant arguments including notably the important insights that the humanitarian initiative has produced. Therefore Austria together with 21 other countries has submitted a working paper on the humanitarian
consequences of nuclear weapons. We suggest to use of the dedicated platform of the NPT review process to engage in this discussion.

On one point there is agreement: That the security situation has deteriorated to a dangerous extent over the last months. Some quarters argue that we should just wait until confidence and security conditions are restored, before further disarmament steps can be taken. Such an approach will not lead us out of the negative spiral in which we are now drifting with high speed into a new arms race. History has proved that precisely when tensions were high during the cold war, responsible leaders agreed on the most essential arms control and disarmament treaties. The underlying idea of the NPT is that nuclear weapons threaten security and disarmament increases security, we have therefore to contain the spread of nuclear weapons and seek their elimination. And the evident reason why nuclear weapons pose such a threat are their disastrous humanitarian consequences with global effects.

So we cannot separate national security from human security. The national security of my country is the security of all people living in Austria. Let me draw delegates’ attention to the working paper on this issue submitted by Austria which lays out some of our thinking on this critical issue in which we try to show that there is more common ground than sometimes alleged.

Mr. Chair,

My delegation is happy to see you presiding over our work, because we share your desire to have a constructive atmosphere and to lead us to good results that promotes a better implementation of all pillars including Article VI. We have achieved progress by the adoption of the TPNW, which is indispensable for the full implementation of Article VI.

I thank you Mr. Chair.