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Nuclear Weapons Debate

Statement by

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to the United Nations in Geneva

Austria

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Mr. Chairman,

Austria aligns herself with the statement delivered by the European Union earlier during this thematic debate.

The humanitarian imperative underlies all efforts in the NPT and the entire nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime to achieve a nuclear weapon free world. This is a shared goal of the international community. It is the only guarantee to prevent nuclear weapons from being used. Only in a world free from nuclear weapons can we make sure to prevent their unacceptable humanitarian consequences.

Better awareness of the consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation on human beings and the planet as well as a better understanding of the risks associated with the existence of nuclear weapons will build momentum for achieving nuclear disarmament and eliminating nuclear risks.

The international community has an obligation, in particular on the basis of Article VI of the NPT, to move forward with urgency and to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. Facts-based discussions at the international conferences in Oslo 2013 and Mexico in spring 2014 have contributed to building knowledge and raising awareness in the international community on the humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion and the risks associated with nuclear weapons.

The Vienna „Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons“ will take place on 8 and 9 December 2014. This Conference will provide for a facts-based discussion on a wide range of short and long-term consequences of nuclear weapons explosions. It will also put an emphasis on nuclear weapons testing, discuss the range of human and technical factors that could lead to a nuclear weapon explosion and the response capabilities and challenges of the international system facing such an event. In addition, it will look at existing international legal norms pertaining to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapon explosions.

As Austria has repeatedly stressed, all states have been invited together with elected representatives, relevant international organisations, civil society organisations and academia. Austria has engaged in intensive outreach to promote the Conference in a very transparent manner. The Vienna Conference aims for a better understanding of „why“ the shared goal of a nuclear weapon free world should be pursued as a global priority.
The Vienna Conference is a contribution that Austria makes to international nuclear disarmament efforts in general, but in particular as a non-nuclear weapon state to the implementation of its commitments under the NPT 2010 Action Plan Action 1 „to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons.”

Austria associates herself with the statement delivered by New Zealand on behalf of 155 states during this debate on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, which states inter alia “that awareness of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches and efforts towards nuclear disarmament”.

Mr. Chairman,

Austria welcomes all steps that have been taken by nuclear weapons possessor states in nuclear disarmament and arms control. These important unilateral or bilateral steps, however, are clearly not enough. In Austria’s view, a credible approach to complying with the obligation to nuclear disarmament would mean that nuclear weapon states demonstrate a clear move away from their reliance on nuclear weapons; and that they engage in effective initiatives for the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons.

We call on the NPT community to approach the upcoming Review Conference constructively in order to find a common way forward for the full and effective implementation of Article VI in a concrete and time-bound manner. As the Open-ended Working Group „Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations“ reflected in the consensus report of its 2013 session, the international community must engage constructively on the options available for the political and legal measures in multilateral nuclear disarmament in order to finally enter the stage of negotiations. In this context, Austria would like to express its support for the Working Paper (WP.18) submitted by Ireland on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition to the 2014 NPT PrepCom entitled “Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”.

Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts are mutually reinforcing. Lack of progress on nuclear disarmament increases the risk of proliferation. The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is a key pillar of both, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Although the CTBT has not yet entered into force, the value of the Treaty and the capabilities of its monitoring and verification regime have been clearly demonstrated and acknowledged by the international community. Austria advocates for the earliest possible entry into force of the CTBT and the
universalization of the regime. Austria calls on all states that have not done so, and in particular the remaining Annex 2 States, to sign and ratify the Treaty at the earliest time possible.

Survivors of nuclear tests remind us of the imperative to renew our commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation for the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons.

Austria also highlights the importance of engaging the young generation on disarmament and non-proliferation issues, which represent a “sword of Damocles” for the future of mankind. Only by demonstrating interest in these vital issues for human security and for the continued existence of human civilisation, we can realistically promote peace and a sustainable future for all.

Thank you.