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2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

General Statement

by

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Madam President
Distinguished delegates,

Let me congratulate you on behalf of the Austrian delegation on your election. We look forward to working with you in the next weeks and you can count on the full support of our delegation. Austria aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Madam President,

Austria is strongly committed to the NPT, which remains a legal framework of key importance for international peace, security, and nuclear cooperation. We must recognize at the same time that its credibility is seriously challenged on several aspects.

The universality of the NPT that we all strive for is becoming an ever more remote prospect. This undermines the NPT's value as a security and confidence building instrument especially in Asia and in the Middle East. In this context, Austria fully supports the goal of a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East and the efforts that have been undertaken in the past review cycle. We regret that the conference that was supposed to launch this extremely important process could not be held as yet. We hope that one of the outcomes of this Review Conference will be renewed impetus among all parties involved and that the "Helsinki Conference" can be convened as early as possible.

Universality and cohesion hinges on the credibility of the treaty. Cooperation for peaceful uses of nuclear energy was thought as a benefit for those states that become non-nuclear states parties. The impact on the NPT by nuclear cooperation being granted to states outside the NPT regime has to be seen in this context.

Madam President,

Austria has always supported the most stringent nuclear non-proliferation standards. In this context, we are gravely concerned about the continuing build up of a nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles program in the DPRK. This remains a serious challenge to the international community and the NPT. We call on DPRK to cease its provocative policies and dangerous rhetoric especially with respect to its nuclear weapons programme and engage in serious denuclearisation negotiations. This would benefit the Korean Peninsula, the world and particularly the suffering and isolated population of North Korea.

We have been very encouraged about the negotiation process and the framework agreement to comprehensively resolve the open questions and concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. We hope that these negotiations will lead to a successful conclusion and a good result in the crucial coming weeks. This would be an important gain for the credibility of the NPT.

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty should be by now the most unequivocal success of multilateral disarmament and nonproliferation efforts. The verification regime of the CTBT has been impressively validated in the past years, most recently through the on-

site inspection exercise in Jordan. However, the fact that the CTBT has not yet been brought into legal effect is disappointing and damaging to global disarmament and nonproliferation efforts. We call on all Annex II States to take the necessary steps as soon as possible. In particular, we reject the notion that any one State should wait for another to ratify. The CTBT enters into force only when all Annex II States have done so. Consequently, all Annex II States can and should show leadership on this important treaty.

Madam President,

Austria is gravely concerned about the crisis in Ukraine and its potential negative repercussion for the NPT and the entire international nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation regime. We recall that Ukraine received security assurances and assurances of respect for its territorial integrity under the Budapest Memorandum in direct connection to its accession to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon States. Moreover, there is much talk again in Europe about nuclear weapons in the context of the Ukraine crisis. We hear some rhetoric that can only be called nuclear brinkmanship. We hear voices that wish to reemphasize the role of nuclear weapons or that claim that this crisis should be a reason to halt nuclear disarmament and arms control efforts all together. Austria strongly opposes such views. We are convinced that the current tensions in Europe, which unfortunately remains the continent most affected by the presence of nuclear weapons, make the focus on nuclear disarmament and the full implementation of all NPT obligations and commitments all the more important. Nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence are not the answer to Europe's security concerns.

This Review Conference takes place at a critical juncture for the NPT and the entire nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation regime. When we met five years ago to review the status and operation of the NPT, we worked together to achieve the 2010 Action Plan, which was heralded as a significant success. Agreeing on a set of 64 concrete actions across 3 pillars and particularly the 23 actions on nuclear disarmament, was supposed to make progress measurable and provide a road map for the achievement of the goals of the treaty.

The agreement in 2010 was essential also to restore credibility of the NPT as a framework for nuclear disarmament in light of the disappointing degree of implementation of the 1995 principles and objectives and the 13 practical steps for nuclear disarmament that had been agreed to in 2000. We looked upon the 2010 Action Plan as an expression of urgency and setting a clear course towards the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons. In this context, we acknowledge the continuing implementation of the new START and some positive developments in individual nuclear weapon States, such as proposals for further nuclear arms reductions and steps with respect to transparency. Overall, however, after five years of working with the 2010 Action Plan, we must conclude that the implementation of Article 6 and the disarmament part of the Action Plan are not sufficiently credible and a cause of serious concern.

Contrary to our expectations and hopes, we have not seen a determined move away from reliance on nuclear weapons in the past years. We have heard statements by political

leaders in nuclear weapon States declaring the clear intention to retain nuclear weapons for several decades as being necessary for their national security. This is further evidenced by plans and very large budget allocations to modernize nuclear weapons and the respective infrastructure in nuclear weapon States. We are very concerned about these developments and the obvious credibility problem this causes for the NPT. The modernization and long term plans to retain nuclear weapons may not be in direct violation of the letter of the NPT. However, these decisions are certainly contrary to the spirit and purpose of Article VI of the NPT and the commitments undertaken in 1995, 2000 and 2010. This is a dangerous development for the global nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation regime and indeed for international law all together. The permanent members of the UN Security Council have a special responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security in the world, including in efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Such efforts are undermined and suffer from a credibility deficit if the same States promote the concept and supposed value of nuclear weapons for their own security.

We consider this the most fundamental threat to the credibility of the NPT which we must resolve. Austria is convinced that we can only do this through a collective and determined move away from nuclear weapons all together through strong nonproliferation measures and credible and urgent nuclear disarmament.

Austria has been involved in the past review cycle in several efforts together with other stakeholders to take the nuclear disarmament agenda forward. We promoted the restart of negotiations in the dysfunctional Conference on Disarmament in the follow up to the High Level Meeting that the UN Secretary General had convened in 2010 with a follow up resolution in the General Assembly.

Austria worked with other States to establish an Open Ended Working Group on *Taking forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations (A/RES/67/56)* which met successfully in 2013 and adopted a final report by consensus based on the very productive and substantive discussions and recommendations on how to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons.

Most importantly, Austria is strongly invested into promoting the humanitarian imperative in all efforts and negotiations related to nuclear weapons. The focus on this aspect and the fact that the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons is now firmly established in the international agenda is, in our assessment, the single most positive and important development of the past review cycle. Austria co-initiated the joint declarations on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons together with the so-called "Group of 16". The latest version of this statement was delivered only yesterday by Austria's Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz on behalf of 159 States.

Last December, Austria organised and hosted the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. It was the third international conference of this kind following

two previous meetings in Norway and Mexico. The Vienna Conference was attended by 158 States, a broad spectrum on international organizations from the UN system, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, many academics and experts and several hundred representatives of civil society. The discussions and findings with respect to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, the risks associated with the existence of these weapons, as well as the legal and moral dimension of this weaponry constitute a powerful set of arguments that should lead to an urgent and profound change in the nuclear weapons debate. Moreover, the conclusions that have emerged from the humanitarian initiative demonstrate the interest and responsibility for nuclear disarmament that all States must act upon. In light of these conclusions the arguments for the retention of nuclear weapons must be considered a high risk and ultimately irresponsible gamble based on an illusion of security and safety.

Austria also issued a national pledge which highlighted the conclusions that we think need to be drawn from this new evidence, inter alia that (...) *all states parties to the NPT to (should) identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons (...), and the wish to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders (...) in efforts to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks.*

We are grateful that nearly 80 States have formally supported and/or endorsed this pledge to date.

We are convinced that the importance of the humanitarian initiative lies in the fact that it strengthens the taboo against nuclear weapons as such. Strengthening the case for the illegitimacy of nuclear weapons based on their consequences and associated risks works as a powerful set of arguments for disarmament and non-proliferation alike. The humanitarian focus is thus maybe the best hope to shore up support for the NPT and to create and maintain a strong nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. It should be seen as a wakeup call and as an issue that unites the international community into urgent and determined action away from a reliance on nuclear weapons. Together with many likeminded partners, Austria will work constructively and with high objectives to translate this common sense of purpose into the work of this conference.

We therefore look forward to working with you, Madam President, and all other partners to achieving an ambitious, strong and credible outcome that will strengthen the NPT.

Thank you