Statement
by the Delegation of Austria
at the First Committee
of the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly

Agenda item 75
Report of the Conference on Disarmament

New York
23 October 2003
Mr. Chairman,

I am taking the floor to thank Japan and in particular, Ambassador Itohuchi for her efforts regarding resolution A/C.1/58/L.5. There are some new formulations in the resolution that clearly express the sense of urgency that the international community feels regarding the stalemate that has been imposed on the CD for seven years. We think that it is highly appropriate that the General Assembly expresses this sense of urgency.

As many of you might be aware, Austria considered tabling a separate resolution with exactly this aim.

Our rationale was based on the fact that the CD, although an independent body, is linked to the United Nations General Assembly by a formal relationship:

- the CD was established in 1979 as a result of the first Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly held in 1978,
- the CD is financed through the UN-budget,
- the CD Secretary General is nominated by the Secretary General of the UN,
- Rule 27 of the Rules of Procedure of the CD stipulates that the CD shall take into account the recommendations of the United Nations General Assembly when adopting its agenda,
- Several 1st Committee Resolutions address CD matters in individual resolutions (PFMET, PAROS, nuclear disarmament et al.). However, there is no resolution, which deals politically with the CD and its ongoing inactivity.

The CD's requirement to report to United Nations General Assembly under rules 43 to 45 stems from that formal relationship. Since 1997, these reports have been devoid of progress. Consequently, as a matter of responsibility, more direct engagement with UNGA is required than merely taking note of the factual report.

This responsibility is all the more pressing at a time of widespread international concern about proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery as well as about WMD and nuclear materials falling into the hands of terrorists, and, generally about the commitment to nuclear disarmament. The current situation therefore merits that the UNGA, with its universal membership, expresses its concern about the stalemate in the CD and urges the CD member states to overcome the outstanding differences.

Consequently, we thought it to be appropriate to give members as well as non-members of CD the chance to express their dissatisfaction with the current stalemate and their wish for substantive progress on disarmament issues. And, we wanted to bring to the attention of the broader membership of the UN the ongoing impasse in the CD over the programme of work.

In so doing, it was our goal to underline the fact that the overwhelming majority of states is of the same conviction regarding the need to start substantive work in the CD and thereby increase the pressure on the CD to resolve the impasse over its Programme of Work at the outset of 2004.
All delegations, which have taken the floor in this committee, have expressed their wish that the CD adopt a program of work at the beginning of 2004 and begin its work. We have elaborated the text of a draft to give expression precisely for this shared desire.

At the end of the 2003 session, there was some encouraging signs of movement. We appreciate the flexibility demonstrated by some states regarding their readiness to join consensus on the basis of the amended version of the 5-ambassadors proposal contained in CD/1693 Rev.1.

Intensive consultations in Geneva and during the last two weeks in New York clearly showed to us that our approach was widely shared. However, some delegations expressed concern about the timing of such a resolution given the fact that some movement towards overcoming the CD-situation might be possible.

It was and is, of course, our only intention to be constructive and to do whatever we can to help in this process. We have therefore decided not to table our resolution this year, as we do not want to do anything that might be considered counterproductive at this very crucial moment.

However, let me be clear that we -- and as I am sure the vast majority of the international community -- have a clear expectation that the stalemate of the CD will be overcome at the beginning of next year's session. We are optimistic that there will be no need next year to reconsider our project.

In closing, I would like to stress again our support for the current and the incoming presidency of the CD in their efforts to achieve this goal, as well as Austria's appreciation and support for the amended proposal of the 5-Ambassadors.