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First Committee
Thematic Discussion on Conventional Weapons

Statement by
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to the United Nations in Geneva

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Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to congratulate and to thank you -- as well as the other members of the Bureau -- for your excellent work in presiding over this Committee.

Austria associates itself fully with the statement on this thematic issue made by Sweden, on behalf of the EU and would like to stress a number of points, to which we attach particular importance. Allow me to add a few specific points of particular interest to Austria, at a time when we can welcome a new global commitment to comprehensive disarmament and non-proliferation. This is raising expectations with regard to a number of issues which contribute to a busy international agenda ahead.

Small Arms and Light Weapons

Mr. Chairman,

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) have rightly but sadly been termed the "real weapons of mass destruction": Every year, hundreds of thousands of people are killed through their use.

The UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects remains the cornerstone of international efforts in this regard and constitutes a significant step forward to combat illicit proliferation of SALW. Austria supports its implementation with particular focus on the African continent. We are heartened that the Third Biennial Meeting of States (BMS-3) last July under the able chairmanship of Ambassador Cekuolis (Lithuania) laid out an action-oriented path for a more effective implementation of the Programme and we look forward to working with Amb. Macedo (MEX) as the chairman designate for the Fourth Biennial Meeting of States (BMS-4) next year. The Programme needs full attention from us all.

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

Insecurity, instability, human rights violations, lost development opportunities are only some of the negative consequences of illegal arms trade. Austria therefore supports early negotiation of a strong and robust arms trade treaty. We believe that current discussions on procedural questions distract us from the main goal -- a strong treaty -- and should therefore be postponed until the International Conference on the ATT itself or its last preparatory committee meeting.

Overall, we have witnessed an intensifying range of preparatory activities. Within the framework of an EU/UNIDIR series of regional seminars, Austria is honoured to host both the last regional seminar addressing OSCE countries as well as the concluding conference of this whole seminar series which is aimed at presenting the up-do-date state of the discussions, recommendations and ideas on the ATT process to the
international community. These two conferences will take place 10 to 12 February 2010 in Vienna.

Allow me already at this stage to extend an invitation for participation in these meetings and express my delegation’s confidence that jointly we will succeed in laying the ground for a successful treaty negotiation.

**Land-Mines**

The prohibition of anti-personnel mines has been a constant priority of Austrian foreign policy. Since its adoption, Austria has lent its full support to the Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa convention) and we are committed to continue to do so at the upcoming Second Review Conference in Cartagena, Columbia, by working towards a strong Cartagena Action Plan. This Action Plan should assist States in implementing their commitments and bring us closer to a mine-free-world. With this goal ahead of us Austria calls on all States who have not yet done so to accede to the Mine Ban Treaty at the earliest date.

One of Austria’s priorities has been and continues to be the improvement of assistance to landmine victims. In preparation of the Cartagena Conference Austria cosponsored a project to examine the global impact and remaining challenges of the Mine Ban Treaty to improve the situation of victims. This project’s results are brought together in a report titled “Voices from the Ground” – the report was presented in Geneva on 2 September 2009 by the Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger. The report constitutes a thorough analysis of what has been achieved up to date for the betterment of landmine survivors and their affected families and communities; at the same time, it highlights areas where more work needs to be done in order to secure for mine victims a life in dignity and economic independence.

Austria will continue to strengthen victim assistance - within the Mine Ban Treaty, as well as in other fora, such as the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Conventional Weapons Convention. As some of you may be aware, Austria was also actively involved in the preparation of the “Plan of Action on Victim Assistance under Protocol V”, adopted last November in the framework of the CCW.

One important future task will be the overall coordination of victim assistance activities. There is a need for best possible coordination among all relevant fora and actors to avoid duplications in order to allow the use of resources in the most rational and effective manner.

**Cluster Munitions**

The Mine Ban Treaty has inspired the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the most important recent contribution to international humanitarian law and disarmament. At the margins of our committee, there will be a special event on 21 October organised by UNODA/UNDP, “Closing in on entry-into-force of the Convention on Cluster Munitions”.
Austria, having ratified the Convention as sixth state on 2 April 2009, strongly encourages States to use the opportunity of this side-event to sign the Convention or deposit their instrument of ratification. We commend Malawi and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for their ratification early October thus bringing us closer to the Convention’s entry into force. It is our sincere hope that the Convention will receive the necessary 30 ratifications before the end of this year. We welcome the offer made by Lao PDR to host the First Meeting of States Parties. To support the early entry into force of the CCM, Austria has engaged in a worldwide campaign and will support a Cluster Munitions Conference in Indonesia in November this year.

In conclusion, let me express Austria’s continued commitment in contributing actively to these processes, as well as our expectations for active engagement by all in order to secure meaningful results.

Thank you.