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First Committee
Thematic Discussion on Nuclear Weapons

Statement by
Ambassador Thomas MAYR-HARTING
Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations,
New York
Mr. Chairman,

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

Austria associates herself fully with the statement on this thematic issue made by Belgium, on behalf of the EU.

Austria wishes to stress a number of points, to which we attach particular importance.

Turning first to the outcome of the NPT Review Conference last May: 2010 may, in future, be remembered as the year when, for the first time, a world without nuclear weapons was articulated as the goal of nuclear disarmament by NPT States Parties. Austria was honoured to have contributed to the negotiation of the NPT Action Plan on Nuclear Disarmament, which contains a number of very welcome commitments and some important novelties:

- all States committed to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the objective of a world without nuclear weapons;

- an important step towards de-legitimation of nuclear weapons was taken through the new reference to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use, and the need to comply with international humanitarian law;

- new principles of verifiability and transparency were agreed, adding to the existing principle of irreversibility, agreed at the 2000 Review Conference;

- Action 5 of the Action Plan established a framework according to which NWS are called upon to engage on a number of vital issues. And, by including a timeframe for reporting by Nuclear Weapon States, the onus is now on those States to deliver. We very much welcome France's announcement regarding P5 talks next year, and hope that this will establish a process of frequent meetings;

- As regards nuclear testing, the Action Plan contains a strong commitment by the nuclear-weapon States to ratify the CTBT "with all expediency", noting that positive decisions by them would have a beneficial impact on ratification, in particular by Annex 2 States;

- New provisions on transparency mark a significant advance on 2000, in particular Action 21, which places the nuclear-weapon States under strong pressure to agree on a standard reporting form and invites the Secretary General to establish a publicly accessible repository;

- Finally, the Action Plan states that "all States need to make special efforts to establish the necessary framework to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons" and notes "the five-point proposal for nuclear disarmament of the Secretary General, which proposes, inter alia, consideration on a nuclear weapons convention or agreement on a framework of separate mutually reinforcing instruments backed by a strong system of verification".
This last point places the prospect of a legal framework, such as a nuclear weapons convention, on the international disarmament agenda for the first time in an agreed document. This process has now begun, and it is up to us to identify the appropriate sequencing of steps.

Of course, nothing will come of these commitments if the multilateral disarmament machinery is not fit for purpose. This brings me to the second part of my intervention: While much can be done through bilateral agreements, the new commitments made this year require us to start putting in place immediately the central components for reaching Global Zero, such as a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. As the Austrian Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, Mr. Michael Spindelegger, indicated at the High-level Meeting on 24 September, we must address the blockage in the Conference on Disarmament or accept that it faces becoming obsolete. For this reason, Austria strongly supported the initiative of the Secretary-General to convene the High-level Meeting and was pleased that it succeeded in shining a spotlight on the unacceptable situation in the CD, which threatens to hamper our disarmament efforts.

Together with a group of other sponsors, Austria has tabled a draft resolution on “Follow-up to the High-level Meeting held on 24 September 2010 - Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations”. We will introduce the text on Monday next in the Disarmament Machinery cluster, but I would like to say at this stage that we see the next year as crucial for the CD. Foreign Minister Spindelegger explained Austria’s position, there is no need to repeat it here. But it is clear that, in our view, the CD now has one more chance.

Mr. Chairman,

The process towards pursuing the legal foundations for a world without nuclear weapons has already begun and it is up to us not only to identify the appropriate sequencing of steps, but also to associate ourselves with the best partners and institutions in order to proceed in the most effective manner. In Austria’s view, civil society will assume a paramount role in the process. For this reason, Austria is supporting the establishment of a Competence Centre for Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation in Vienna. This Centre will act as a hub, a platform for independent expertise, monitoring and advocacy regarding nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Some time ago, we invited submissions from interested partner institutions and today was the deadline for receipt of submissions. We will announce further details of how this will take shape in the coming weeks.

In this way, Austria hopes to make a further contribution towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons, which is the only absolute guarantee against the use of nuclear weapons. This should be our ultimate goal, to ban these immoral weapons outright, in the same way that nations have come together to ban other weapons of mass destruction which cause untold human suffering, ruin economies and pollute our fragile planet.