Panel III on additional measures to increase awareness and understanding of the complexity of and interrelationship between the wide range of humanitarian consequences that would result from any nuclear detonation

Statement by Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations in Geneva
Ambassador Thomas Hajnoczi

Thank you Mr. Chair,

First of all, I want to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, that you have enabled us to listen to Mrs. Setsuko Thurlow. Her testimony as a survivor of the nuclear bomb in Hiroshima is the motivation why we are here and why we have to eliminate nuclear weapons. I thank the two panelists, Ms. Sara Sekkenes and Dr. Helfand for their excellent presentations and forward-looking approach on increased awareness and understanding of the wide range of humanitarian consequences that would result from any nuclear detonation. Indeed, all studies on the medical, environmental agricultural and climate-related consequences show mind-boggling results. They are not contested by other studies. So while we favour further scientific studies, there is no need to delay acting until their results are available. These studies are a call for action and the time to act is now.

This increased awareness and understanding is at the heart of the humanitarian initiative. When talking about awareness and understanding, it is worth pointing out that the Humanitarian Initiative provided a framework for non-nuclear weapon States and in particular also for States that usually have had a less visible role in multilateral disarmament fora to contribute substantively from a humanitarian perspective rather than from the traditional military security or nuclear deterrence based perspective.
The discussion cannot be confined to a small circle of diplomats and generals. As the consequences would affect vital fields of our existence, so many politicians, economists, scientists, international organizations and the media should take part in the debate. This holds true in particular for civil society organizations and academia, and most of all the broad public. Therefore I welcome the strong presence of NGOs in the room. All of this helped to change the discourse and led to a substantial shift in the way we talk and think about nuclear weapons and the risks and potential consequences of their use.

It was and is indeed one key objectives of the Humanitarian Initiative to convey the facts about nuclear weapons use to a broader audience, so that the general public is not excluded from the debate. We need informed citizens. Clearly there is a need for public education efforts in order to narrow the gap between public perception and nuclear reality.

Austria would like to put forward the following recommendations:

1. Delegations today as well as in the February session have called for the promotion of disarmament and non-proliferation education and training, including on the humanitarian consequences. My delegation would support these calls.

2. Austria also recommends continuing the discussion on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in other global fora. For example, at the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit Austria, where Austria is co-sponsoring a side event on the humanitarian impact of weapons, provides such an opportunity.

3. A recommendation that my delegation already put forward in the February session is to ensure that decision-makers get more exposure to the real impact of nuclear weapons. We therefore very much welcome the recent high level visit to Hiroshima and encourage more such visits to directly witness the consequences of nuclear weapons use and talk with the survivors.

4. Another avenue for greater public engagement would be to present the impact on the world economy and consider the costs of nuclear weapons a potential use, but also the billions for their development, production and
maintenance. These extremely high sums could be used for effective measures that would greatly improve the living conditions on our planet.

I would like to put forward the following question not only to the panelists, but to all of us: What could we be further done to promote the awareness and understanding of risks of nuclear weapons and spread information about what nuclear weapons actually do in ways that are easy to digest in different communities around the world in order to increase public awareness?

I thank you!