Annual Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

General Exchange of Views

13 November 2014

Statement by

AUSTRIA

Ambassador Thomas Hajnoczi

Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations in Geneva
Mr. President,

At the outset allow me to congratulate you for your assumption of your important function and assure you of the full support of my delegation. Austria fully subscribes to the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union earlier during this debate.

Universalization, effective implementation and responsiveness to new developments and challenges are key tasks that High Contracting Parties to the CCW are facing today.

Austria commends the efforts of the Presidency and all stakeholders in implementing the Accelerated Plan of Action on Universalization of the Convention and its Protocols and warmly welcomes the accession of Iraq to the Convention.

Protocol V of the Convention, if implemented effectively, can make an important contribution to reducing the suffering of and humanitarian impact on civilians during and after armed conflict. In this vein, Austria supports all efforts pursuant to Protocol V to further strengthen implementation, monitor progress and make this progress measurable. Austria believes that High Contracting Parties that are Parties to Protocol V can offer a wealth of experience from implementing victim assistance measures pursuant to their obligations, as guided by the Action Plan on Victim Assistance. In line with the recommendations adopted at the 8th Conference, we hope for a thorough exchange among High Contracting Parties of the Convention to follow with the aim of strengthening the assistance to survivors, affected families and communities of weapons prohibited and regulated under this Convention according to their rights and needs. We also attach great importance to the recommendation adopted by the 8th Conference of Protocol V to continue the exchange of practical experiences and lessons learned on victim assistance with other relevant legal instruments.

Mr. President,

Serious cases of indiscriminate use of conventional weapons, including weapons regulated by the CCW, raise important questions about the observance of international law, existing legal norms and effective implementation.

Austria is deeply concerned about recent reports released by Human Rights Watch on the unacceptable suffering that the use of incendiary weapons in Syria and
Ukraine has caused for the civilian population. These reports have raised serious questions on the application of international humanitarian law. There is no doubt that the use of incendiary weapons against civilians is impermissible under IHL. In addition, Austria reiterates its position that it is willing to examine the existing provisions on incendiary weapons under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and its Protocol III in particular, with regard to their application and efficacy.

Mr. President,

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas causes unacceptable harm for the civilian population and casualties at a large scale. Furthermore, it often implies severe long-term costs, as recent cases in Syria, Gaza and Ukraine sadly demonstrate. Austria is concerned about these developments. The international community should step up its efforts and explore ways on how to more effectively implement the existing legal framework in order to provide adequate protection to civilians from the severe harm of these weapons.

In this context, we commend the efforts of the Coordinators on improvised explosive devices (IEDs) pursuant to Amended Protocol II to raise awareness and advance deliberations on what High Contracting Parties could concretely contribute to curbing the threat of IEDs in this specific multilateral setting. We support the recommendations by the Sixteenth Annual Conference that should allow for an enhanced exchange of information and development of best practices on various aspects of the issue.

Mr. President,

Austria supports the questions raised by development of autonomous weapons to be treated with a sense of urgency in the relevant UN fora on the basis of a multi-disciplinary approach. In this vein, we support an expert meeting in the framework of the CCW to be convened in 2015 as a step in progressing in our deliberations. As such, we are also in favor of documentation to be provided at the expert meeting, which we believe could further enhance the substantive quality of our discussions. A sufficiently broad mandate should allow the meeting to discuss the various aspects related to emerging technologies in the field of autonomous weapons systems, including legal, technical, ethical and societal aspects. The expert meeting should be
inclusive in view of the broad range of expertise available from states, international organizations and particularly civil society.

In closing, Mr. President, I would like to reiterate a point that Austria has highlighted earlier this week that the active involvement of an informed civil society is essential in order to make our efforts in this forum sustainable and effective. In this vein, we reiterate the great importance of keeping this forum open to the participation of civil society on a non-discriminatory basis and of including the perspectives and expertise by civil society and academia in all our discussions.

I thank you.