Mr. Chairman,

Austria aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the EU yesterday. In addition to the national implementation report submitted by Austria, I would like to make the following comments.

As we said in the general statement, there appear to be serious contradictions and differences in the way key provisions of the NPT and NPT-based commitments are seen within the treaty membership. This is particularly the case for nuclear disarmament. We are concerned about the NPT’s ability to sustain these contradictions for much longer. They need to be addressed and solved.

For the most part of the nuclear age, the parameters were clear: A few states only were in possession of nuclear weapons and had the required knowledge and technological capabilities. These parameters are fast losing their validity. The technological hurdle still exists but it is getting lower by the day. More and more states – and potentially non-state actors – will be in a position to de facto reach or cross the line of nuclear weapons capability. The decision to do this will increasingly become a political rather than technological one. The consequences of this trend cannot be overstated. It means an exponentially increasing risk of nuclear weapons proliferation and, consequently, the risk of their use by someone somewhere. A focus on non-proliferation alone – as important as it is – is ultimately doomed to fail. With the technological threshold getting lower and the interest in nuclear technology getting higher, the only long term approach is to build credible political and legal barriers against nuclear weapons as such and to reduce and eliminate the perceived political and security motivations for the possession of these weapons.

This needs to be done with a much greater sense of urgency, since there is a race against time. The global regime can either be maintained and maybe even strengthened and the spread of nuclear weapons stopped. Or the legitimacy of the NPT and the entire regime will be undermined with the potential consequence of more and more actors seeking to develop nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons states have the prime responsibility to prevent this but they need to realise with urgency that in the final consequence they cannot have it both ways. We see today that global efforts to counter the proliferation of nuclear weapons – which Austria fully supports – would be significantly aided if the main proponents would not rely on nuclear weapons as “ultimate guarantors of security” for themselves. Admittedly, discarding nuclear weapons takes a lot of political courage on the part of those who have relied on their national nuclear deterrence capabilities for the past decades, but this is a step that is long overdue. All non-nuclear weapons States can assist in making this step easier to take.
Mr. Chairman,

Austria considers the agreement achieved by consensus of the conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions as a very important accomplishment. We hope for full and credible implementation of these commitments and we will try to contribute to this to the extent possible. One important element of the 2010 outcome is that there are concrete actions, particularly on nuclear disarmament, the implementation of which can be measured and assessed critically. Let me pay tribute at this stage to the important role of civil society in providing us with important information on the state of implementation. There are several substantial reports by civil society organizations. Unfortunately, though, they all paint the same picture: Implementation of the nuclear disarmament commitments is unsatisfactory.

Austria welcomes all steps that have been taken by nuclear weapons states, such as the START Agreement between RF and US on reductions of strategic nuclear weapons, some changes in nuclear doctrines, as well as some steps to increase transparency. Every step that moves us away from the dangers of nuclear weapons needs to be seen positively. These steps, however, are clearly not enough. In Austria’s view the credible implementation of Article 6 and of the various commitments agreed to in the past Review Conferences would mean that nuclear weapons states demonstrate in a discernible way a clear direction away from their reliance on nuclear weapons. This, however, is nowhere in sight.

In 2015, the status of implementation of the disarmament commitments will be a major factor. NPT-non-nuclear weapons states will look upon the overall picture and specifically at

- What changes have been made to diminish the role of nuclear weapons?
- What changes have been made with respect to operational readiness and alert status?
- What decisions are made in nuclear weapons states with respect to budget allocations and investments in nuclear weapons and their infrastructure?
- What will be the progress towards the long overdue entry into force of the CTBT and
- What will be the situation in the multilateral disarmament machinery – especially in the Conference on Disarmament?

We call on the nuclear weapons states to take these concerns – which are probably shared by most other NPT state parties – seriously and to accelerate their efforts for a credible and transparent implementation of their nuclear disarmament commitments.

Mr. Chairman,

On a more positive note, there is clearly a growing understanding that progress on nuclear disarmament needs be made and that the current situation – in terms of process but more importantly on substance – is no longer acceptable. Several initiatives have been launched, which Austria has either contributed to or has supported. They are different manifestations of one thing: The strong wish for progress on nuclear disarmament.

The open-ended working group on “Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations” decided by the UNGA last fall offers an opportunity to generate more momentum towards nuclear disarmament. We currently do not have comprehensive and interactive discussions about nuclear disarmament in any multilateral forum. The OEWG is a forum and an opportunity to have this discussion about nuclear disarmament, the possible ways forward and the challenges. It is also an opportunity to address some of the contradictions and different perspectives that were mentioned earlier.
Austria hopes that the OEWG will be used in this way and will thus be a contribution to generating momentum for progress on nuclear disarmament. We would like to state clearly that we see the establishment of the OEWG entirely consistent and contributing to the objectives of the NPT and the 2010 Action Plan.

Austria also supported the General Assembly resolutions on convening a HLM meeting on nuclear disarmament as well as the establishment of a Group of Governmental Expert on an FMCT. We are confident that these initiatives will also generate momentum for our shared goal.

Mr. Chairman,

Austria is convinced that it is necessary and overdue to put the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons at the center of our debate, including in the NPT. Nuclear weapons are not just a security policy issue for a few states but an issue of serious concern for the entire international community. The humanitarian, environmental, health, economic and developmental consequences of any nuclear weapons explosion would be devastating and global and any notion of adequate preparedness or response is an illusion. We are highly appreciative that the government of Norway provided the international community with an opportunity for an in depth and enlightening discussion on this important topic. This discourse needs to be furthered. We look forward to the follow up conference in Mexico and to other future occasions. Austria was pleased to participate in and contribute to the joint statement that was delivered by South Africa on behalf of over seventy states yesterday. I would like to stress that in Austria’s view, a key motivation behind the NPT and the entire nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime is the humanitarian imperative: to prevent nuclear weapons from being used, to eliminate this existential threat from the face of the earth and to make sure that unacceptable humanitarian consequences from these weapons do not occur. Arguments that this discourse may in any way distract or divert from the NPT implementation are therefore unconvincing and misguided.

Mr. Chairman,

Austria puts a particular emphasis on the role of civil society in the international debate on disarmament and non-proliferation. During the NGO Panel, we listened to the voices of the “youth of the world” – our future, and we thank them for their engagement. We have joined also in a statement that Japan will deliver on behalf of a group of member states on the importance of disarmament and non-proliferation education. We would also like to express our satisfaction that the Vienna Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP) has been established in 2011 as an independent think-tank and that the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs has opened its Vienna Office in 2012. Both entities have been set up with significant Austrian financial support and are making important contributions to our collective work.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me close by reiterating our commitment to the NPT and the implementation of the 2010 conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions. We should use the opportunity to strengthen the credibility and cohesion of this important treaty. Clear progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons is the best way to achieve this goal.

Thank you.