Statement

by

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at the

General Debate of the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

New York, 29 April 2014
Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Ambassador Roman-Morey, on your election as chair of this Preparatory Committee. You can count on our full support.

Austria aligns herself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and would also like to refer to the statement of the Vienna Group of 10.

This 3rd Preparatory Committee of the current review cycle will provide us with as yet another opportunity to assess where the NPT membership stands with respect to the balanced implementation of and compliance with the Treaty one year before the next Review Conference. This meeting holds particular interest also due to the reporting obligation for nuclear weapon states under action 5 of the 2010 conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions that Austria awaits with interest.

Mr. Chairman,

The Preparatory Committee also takes place against the background of the crisis in the Ukraine, which lies in Austria's immediate neighborhood. We are deeply concerned about the possible implications of this crisis for the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. We are particularly concerned about some comments in recent times that have attempted to present this crisis as a validation of nuclear weapons possession and nuclear deterrence. In Austria's view, such comments are entirely misplaced and irresponsible and only risk to unjustifiably fuel the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Therefore, Austria would like to state clearly that it views Ukraine's decision in 1994 to transfer the ex-Soviet nuclear weapon stockpile to Russia and to join the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state as a very important contribution to international as well as its own security. Ukraine and all other states that have abandoned existing nuclear weapon stockpiles and programs have reduced the risks of nuclear annihilation. They have made a tremendous contribution to the security of their own peoples as well as to the security of humankind at large.

Mr. Chairman,

Austria is strongly committed to the NPT, which remains a legal framework of key importance for international peace, security, and nuclear cooperation. While it has served the international community well in the past, we must recognize that its credibility is seriously challenged on several key aspects. The treaty's effectiveness in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons has been challenged. However, there are increasing doubts to what extent the NPT can still be seen as an effective and credible framework to achieve nuclear disarmament. The universality of the NPT that we all strive for, is becoming an ever more remote possibility, which undermines the NPT's value as a security and confidence building instrument in regional contexts. Universality and cohesion of the treaty is also not helped by nuclear cooperation being granted to states outside the NPT. The NPT membership needs to address all these challenges with urgency to avoid further loss of confidence in the credibility of the treaty. For every legal instrument there is only a finite level of inconsistencies or credibility deficits that can be absorbed before the fundamental equilibrium of broad support is disturbed.
Mr. Chairman,

Austria has always supported the most stringent nuclear non-proliferation standards. In this context, we are gravely concerned about the continuing build up of a nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles program in the DPRK. This remains a serious challenge to the international community and the NPT. On the other hand, we are encouraged about the negotiations under way with the aim to comprehensively resolve the open questions and concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. We hope that these negotiations will be successful and result in a strengthening of the NPT and all its pillars. Also the case of Syria needs to be resolved.

However, the focus on proliferation is not sufficient. As long as some states regard nuclear weapons as a legitimate security hedge for themselves, efforts to counter nuclear proliferation will always suffer from a fundamental contradiction and credibility deficit. Both the possession of nuclear weapons and reliance on nuclear deterrence are drivers for proliferation. We are convinced that nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts can only be successful if they are pursued together with the same sense of urgency and credibility.

The conclusions and recommendations for follow on actions agreed to at the 2010 Review Conference (2010 Action Plan) underscore this urgency. They would, if implemented credibly, put us on a right track to achieve nuclear disarmament and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. One year away from the 2015 Review Conference, we are concerned about the very limited progress in the implementation of the Action Plan, in particular with respect to Article 6 of the treaty. We welcome every step that is consistent with the Article 6 obligation and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons and we note the steps in this regard taken by some nuclear weapon states. However, we are disappointed with what we see as a continuing lack of readiness by nuclear weapon states to take the required robust steps away from their reliance on nuclear weapons. Such steps are key elements of the NPT disarmament agreements of 1995, 2000 and 2010. In order to maintain global support for the NPT and the entire nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime and to halt the spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear-weapon states need to add a lot more credibility and urgency to their nuclear disarmament efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

In 2010, the NPT Review Conference resolved that "all States parties commit to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons". This Action 1 underscores that the implementation of all provisions of the NPT, including Art. 6, is a collective responsibility of the entire NPT membership. It is encouraging that non-nuclear-weapon states have focused on this issue with a renewed sense of responsibility. Several initiatives have been launched as a direct consequence of non-nuclear-weapon states' commitment to Article 6 in line with Action 1 of the 2010 Action Plan. One of these initiatives was the Open-ended Working Group established in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 67/56. It met during 2013 and produced a substantive consensus report including proposals for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons. Another important manifestation of the shared wish to facilitate progress was the high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on nuclear disarmament on
September 26, 2013. The Federal President of Austria, Heinz Fischer, addressed the opening session\(^1\) of this conference.

However, the most important development in line with Action 1 is the increased focus by the international community on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. This is a long overdue shift in the discourse on nuclear weapons, away from the traditional narrow national security policy focus of possessor states in recent times. Several cross-regional joint declarations by very large numbers of states have been delivered on this issue during the NPT Review Process as well as in the UN General Assembly. The facts-based discussions at the international conferences in Oslo (2013) and Nayarit (2014) have contributed to a greater understanding of the unacceptable immediate and long-term humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons explosions. Moreover, the considerable and unacceptable risks as a consequence of proliferation, the vulnerability of nuclear command and control networks, in particular to cyber-attacks, to human error and the potential access to nuclear weapons by non-state actors, have been highlighted. Austria is convinced that the focus on their humanitarian consequences has a positive effect on international discussions about nuclear weapons. This forcefully underscores the need to eliminate and prohibit nuclear weapons as a shared and urgent objective. There is growing momentum to firmly anchor the humanitarian imperative in all discussions about nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Chairman,

In this context Austria is proud to host the 3\(^{rd}\) international conference on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons which will take place on 8 and 9 December 2014 in Vienna. The conference will be open to all interested parties. All states will receive an official invitation in the coming weeks. International organizations and civil society representatives with relevant expertise will also be welcome. We are grateful for the very positive comments that we have received so far and look forward to working with all interested parties to ensure that the Vienna conference provides a productive forum to generate momentum for progress on nuclear disarmament. With this initiative, Austria wants to strengthen the NPT of which the humanitarian dimension is an integral and essential part.