First Session of the Preparatory Committee
for the 2020 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty
Vienna, May 2-12, 2017
General Debate

Statement by Austria

delivered by Ambassador Alexander Marschik
Vice-Minister for Political Affairs
May 2, 2017
Mr. President,

Let me congratulate you on behalf of the Austrian delegation on your election. We look forward to working with you over the next two weeks. You can count on our full support.

Austria aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union later. Let me also draw attention to the working papers of the European Union, as well as that of the cross-regional Vienna Group of Ten. We also submitted a written update on our previous reports concerning national implementation of the 2010 Action Plan.

In addition to these documents, I would like to offer some remarks from the national perspective of Austria.

This Review Cycle of the NPT leads up to the 50th anniversary of its entry into force in 2020. We still remember the disappointment of 2015 when we could not overcome our differences and agree on an outcome, as we had done in 2010. Still: the NPT remains the best system for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament that we currently have.

It is therefore important to use the next three years as best as we can to breathe new life into this important treaty. The NPT must be protected and strengthened!

How to do that?

- Strive for universality: The lack of universality of the NPT undermines its very purpose and increases regional tensions. More efforts should therefore be undertaken to bring the few remaining outsiders into the treaty.

- Protect the deal: The NPT is at its core a package: Its provisions on nuclear non-proliferation, peaceful uses of nuclear energy and nuclear disarmament must be implemented in parallel. Not doing so imperils the package deal.

- Implement our agreements: In the NPT, there have been agreements in the past. Take for example the 2010 Action Plan covering all three pillars. Unfortunately, many of the agreed undertakings have not been implemented. The failure to implement has to be addressed during this PrepCom. We cannot
simply repeat the same points again and again. We must implement or risk irrelevance.

Mr. President,

Let me briefly address some developments since the last Review Conference in 2015.

Let me start with the positive:

- We welcome the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran in July 2015 and its implementation under IAEA verification. This has been a significant success for non-proliferation, clearly strengthening the Treaty.

- There is less ground for satisfaction on disarmament, but one hope-inspiring development was the launch of negotiations on a nuclear weapons prohibition, breaking a deadlock in multilateral nuclear disarmament after more than twenty years. Credit is due in this respect to the Humanitarian Initiative which underscored the devastating effects of a nuclear weapons explosion with new evidence. The humanitarian imperative remains our guiding principle in efforts related to nuclear weapons. Let me refer Delegates to the Joint Statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, delivered by the Austrian Foreign Minister Kurz on behalf of 159 States on the occasion of the 2015 NPT Review Conference. This initiative wants to make everyone safer, non-nuclear weapon States and nuclear weapon States alike.

- Some have expressed concerns that the prohibition treaty will undermine the NPT. I can reassure you: The prohibition treaty will not only be fully compatible with the NPT, it will build on the NPT and contribute to its implementation. So the prohibition treaty will not weaken the NPT, it will strengthen it! Just like belonging to a nuclear weapon free zone strengthens the NPT. A recent study by the International Law and Policy Institute on the relation between the future prohibition treaty and the NPT confirms their full compatibility.

There have also been setbacks:

- North Korea’s accelerating build-up of its nuclear and ballistic missile programs is of utmost concern not only for the relevance of the NPT but for regional and global peace and stability in general. Austria calls on the DPRK to
cease its provocative and dangerous policies and rhetoric, to re-engage in negotiations about denuclearization, and to return to the NPT.

- Tensions have risen over the last years not only in North East Asia but also in the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe. In all of these regions, the presence of nuclear weapons significantly raises the stakes of an armed confrontation. We need to discuss security issues in different parts of the world and how we could cope with them without relying on the precarious concept of nuclear deterrence.

- One longstanding concern is the entry into force of the CTBT. We seem to go in circles on this issue. It is important that this PrepCom stresses the need for a moratorium on nuclear test explosions or any other nuclear explosions pending the entry into force of that treaty.

Dear Colleagues,

This PrepCom should also be used as a forum to ask questions and receive answers on a number of developments related to the NPT implementation, such as current modernization programs of nuclear arsenals.

We are also interested in the future engagement between the possessors of the two largest nuclear arsenals in view of the expiry of the New START treaty.

Mr. President,

Disarmament can only work if there is confidence and trust. This also applies to non-proliferation and peaceful uses. We must seek to use all possible fora, including for example the OSCE, to strengthen confidence. We therefore hope to have here in Vienna under your able leadership, Mr. President, open, honest and substantive discussions that contribute to trust and confidence among the parties and lay the ground for a successful review cycle.

I thank you, Mr. President.