Vienna Conference on the
Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons

Statement by
H. E. Ambassador Laercio Antonio Vinhas

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Mr. Chairman,

Brazil would like to commend the Government of Austria for hosting the Third Conference on the Humanitarian Impacts of Nuclear Weapons. We hope the discussions held here help foster a common understanding that, if we are to ever attain a sustainable and secure international order, a world without nuclear weapons is not only desirable, but necessary.

Mr. Chairman,

Seventy years after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and 46 years after nuclear weapon States committed themselves to pursue nuclear disarmament, the existence of nuclear arsenals still haunts the world community.

We are pleased to note that the reemergence of the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament in the past few years has brought renewed energy to the debate on nuclear weapons, highlighting the catastrophic consequences that would ensue from the use, either intentional or by accident, of such weapons. We welcome the engagement of civil society in this process and stress that the disarmament agenda cannot be solely guided by the security concerns of a few States, as the nuclear threat looms over humanity as a whole.

Mr. Chairman,

The elimination of nuclear weapons is the only effective assurance against a humanitarian calamity. However, progress in nuclear disarmament has thus far proven to be insufficient and fragile.

Although some worthy initiatives were undertaken since the end of the Cold War, the results of the so-called "step-by-step" approach have fallen short of initial expectations. The CTBT was finalized almost twenty years ago and is not yet in force. The beginning of negotiations on a fissile material treaty has been stalled for over a decade, making it hard to predict if such a treaty will ever be concluded.

In order to fulfill our moral and legal obligations towards nuclear disarmament, both under international humanitarian law and under Article VI of the NPT, it is imperative to have a political horizon for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. The indefinite extension of the NPT was not meant to indefinitely postpone negotiations on nuclear disarmament. It is high time to challenge the worn-out notion that one must wait for all
stars to align in order to move ahead with nuclear disarmament. On the contrary, only decisive action to fulfill nuclear disarmament commitments can bring about the conditions for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Within the next five months, our countries will be taking part in another NPT Review Conference to verify that progress in nuclear disarmament was modest, if anything. If we are to break the impasse in nuclear disarmament in the coming Review cycle, genuine political will is needed.

Mr. Chairman,

There is a growing debate on a legal ban on nuclear weapons. The ultimate goal to be attained, however, should be the effective elimination of nuclear weapons. The successful cases of the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions show that nuclear disarmament can only be achieved within the context of a comprehensive multilateral treaty with well-defined objectives and a specific timeframe.

Without prejudging the validity of either approach, Brazil believes that these efforts must be pursued within the multilateral system, giving voice and vote to all States. As the negotiating forum par excellence in the field of arms control, the Conference on Disarmament would be the body best suited to the task; however, should this not be a viable option, negotiations could take place within the United Nations Framework, as in the UN General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

Breaking away from the nuclear status quo requires courage and resilience from policy-makers and civil society, but also imagination and pragmatism, to see possibilities where others see only obstacles. The debate on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons can make a lasting political impact on disarmament efforts if its energy is channeled in the right direction, engaging all relevant actors, including the nuclear-weapon States, in an ambitious but realistic exercise to completely eliminate the most terrible weapons ever created.

Thank you.