Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to join previous speakers in warmly thanking the Austrian Government for the outstanding hospitality we have all experienced over the last two days.

Ladies and gentlemen, when German Foreign Minister Steinmeier met his colleagues of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative this April in Hiroshima, he said: “Global Zero is more than a vision, it is a necessity.” End of quote.

Indeed, a world free of nuclear weapons is a necessity for many reasons. The terrible impact of a nuclear weapon detonation is the most compelling one. A regional nuclear war or an act of nuclear terrorism would have catastrophic consequences. The nearly 70-year record of non-use of nuclear weapons must be extended forever. This important Conference has contributed to further enhancing the world’s understanding of the consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation.

This discussion should thus be as inclusive as possible and all positions, including challenges and opportunities should be reflected. Hence, the participation and contributions by two NPT-Nuclear Weapon States, the United States and the United Kingdom, are an important step forward.

We all agree on the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. What we are debating is what we consider the best and most realistic path towards it. After all, we all come from diverse regional and security backgrounds and experiences, past and present. Germany’s commitment to disarmament, arms control and confidence-building remains strong; even as we are currently living through difficult times after Ukraine’s international borders were changed by force and Ukrainian sovereignty was violated.

We understand the growing impatience and frustration about the perceived standstill with regard to nuclear disarmament. But are there any realistic alternatives to the difficult path of further negotiations? Are there short-cuts to Global Zero? Theoretically yes. Practically and
politically: no. There are question marks, if not concerns whether attempts at outlawing or delegitimizing nuclear weapons without including the States possessing them will really get us closer to the ultimate goal of a nuclear weapon free world. Analogies with the Ottawa and Oslo- Conventions are not really convincing, either. In strategic doctrines, nuclear weapons play a fundamentally different role from landmines. And there is the landmark ICJ Advisory Opinion of 1996, in which the Court stated that there is no rule in international law that banned nuclear weapons as such.

As Sam Nunn, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and George Shultz put it succinctly: “A world without nuclear weapons will not simply be today’s world minus nuclear weapons.” In other words, nuclear disarmament takes place in a strategic context. Considering the current size of nuclear arsenals, it is fair to say that this strategic context should not serve as a pretext for not engaging in disarmament negotiations as demanded by Art. VI of the NPT. But neither can we expect substantial progress if the context is ignored. Thus, we consider pursuing the step-by-step or building-block-approach as the most realistic one. This approach has brought about dramatic progress after the fall of the Berlin Wall: nuclear arsenals are going down to the levels prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis. NATO, of which Germany is a member, reduced its nuclear arsenal by over 85%. This notwithstanding, we must keep working for further reductions on all sides! There is little reason to assume that the step-by-step approach can no longer deliver provided it is pursued with leadership and perseverance. In spite of the current security environment, President Obama’s proposal of a new and bold disarmament round remains on the table and could pave the way for much needed progress. We sincerely hope it will be taken up by the Russian Federation rather sooner than later. In addition, the entry into force of the CTBT is long overdue. Negative Security Assurances need strengthening after the breach of the Budapest Memorandum. All of these steps are in line with the obligations under Art. VI of the NPT.

Ladies and gentlemen, one final and crucial point: the NPT is the only international and legally binding framework for further concrete progress if all States and Civil Society work together. A credible and balanced consensual outcome of the NPT-Review Conference is thus of paramount importance. It should be the joint interest of all of us to strengthen the NPT in all its pillars. Let’s work together for a constructive NPT-Review Conference in New York where this important debate will be continued!

Thank you.