Mr. Chairman,

Pursuant to the conclusions and recommendations on follow-on actions agreed by consensus in 2010, all NPT states parties are called upon to regularly report in accordance with Action 20. Accordingly, Austria presented an up-date to its national report of 2013.

We have just received for the first time during this cycle national reports from the five nuclear weapon states that were called upon to accelerate concrete progress on the steps leading to nuclear disarmament and their prompt engagement on certain specific actions in this regard. We will at this stage provide a few preliminary observations on these reports.

We welcome the joint reporting format that the concerned states adopted for their reporting. We also appreciate the institutionalized dialogue that has been established among the nuclear weapon states, which we consider essential.

We acknowledge the steps taken by individual nuclear weapon states. Overall, however, the five reports reflect the critical situation that we are facing as states parties to the NPT, with little significant progress on nuclear disarmament to mark since the reaffirmation of the NPT obligations and commitments in 2010 for achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

It is with great concern that we note throughout the reports of the nuclear weapon states the continued reliance on nuclear weapons. There is little or no action to report that would indicate such a change of policies in nuclear weapon states. In reference to Action 5, we emphasize here again that policy decisions to continue to rely on nuclear weapons increase the risk of proliferation and of use of nuclear weapons, be it by accident, miscalculation or design.

We are equally concerned that there has been no progress on lowering the operational readiness for nuclear weapon systems since the 2010 Review Conference as explicitly called for by Action 5.
We are concerned about nuclear weapon states’ ongoing modernization of nuclear arsenals which cannot be seen as compatible with the spirit and letter of the NPT and the disarmament commitments and obligations. Reporting provided by NWS has unfortunately not provided information on the resources that go into the maintenance and modernization of nuclear weapon systems.

We acknowledge unilateral and bilateral reductions that were launched several years ago by the nuclear weapon states as positive developments to build on. However, during recent years we have not witnessed any more reductions. It is deeply troubling that these developments appear to be indicative of intent by states possessing nuclear weapons to retain them indefinitely. Policy statements in some nuclear weapon states underscore this concern.

While further unilateral and bilateral reductions would be welcome, they are in no way a replacement for transparent, verifiable and irreversible multilateral nuclear disarmament. We recall the obligation reaffirmed by the ICJ in 1996 of all states to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects and under strict and effective international control. We note with regret that the reporting by the nuclear weapon states during this cycle has offered no perspectives on how such negotiations could be facilitated. In this context, we particularly regret that the nuclear weapons states chose to deliberately stay away from the work conducted by the Open-ended Working Group in 2013, which was specifically tasked to look at how to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. This working group produced a substantive consensus report that not only reflects the constructive discussions on how a world without nuclear weapons could be achieved, but also elaborates on the elements required as well as supporting factors for achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons. Various working papers, including the working paper by the New Agenda Coalition on Article VI, offer further concrete ideas in this regard.

Time is overdue for all states to seriously and systematically explore options on how to complement the existing international legal framework in order to make progress towards achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons. The international community has an obligation to move forward with urgency, including on the basis of Article VI of the NPT, to achieve the elimination and prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Besides the work of the Open-ended Working Group, a number of other positive developments have taken place that were initiated by non-nuclear weapon states in line with Action 1 to “pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons”, and we highly commend all these efforts.
The high level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament that took place on 26 September 2013 was an important opportunity to raise the awareness and increase the urgency of nuclear disarmament at the highest political level. Austria was pleased to be presented by its Federal President of State at this event.

As Austria remarked during the General Debate, the renewed interest and engagement of states, international organisations and civil society on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons has been a very significant development. Austria has presented a working paper on this issue to this PrepCom (WP 30). As the Austrian paper points out, the broad based and comprehensive discussions on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, which have taken place in Oslo and in Nayarit – and will take place later this year in Vienna, underscore a growing support to firmly anchor the humanitarian imperative in the discussions about nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament. They build on the preamble of the NPT and pursue the treaty’s goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons as well as implementing the 2010 NPT Action Plan. Better awareness of the devastating humanitarian impact and consequences of nuclear weapons builds momentum for the urgency of achieving nuclear disarmament and results in greater understanding of the need to eliminate this risk.

Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing. Lack of progress on nuclear disarmament is equivalent with an increased risk of proliferation. The CTBT is a key pillar of both, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Bringing the CTBT into force is of utmost importance. The value of the Treaty and the capabilities of its verification regime are obvious and beyond doubt. Austria remains committed to support all possible universalization efforts. We call on all states concerned to ratify the Treaty and particularly appeal to all Annex II states to take serious ratification steps as soon as possible. We highlight the important contribution that the CTBT makes to confidence building in this context.

The joint statement on disarmament and non-proliferation education delivered by Japan earlier during this debate, which Austria associates herself with, stresses the importance of engaging the young generation on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues. It is important for the next generations to understand the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons for fostering a global culture of peace and security. In line with our continuous engagement on this important issue, Austria participates also in a seminar on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation education to be held today during lunchtime at Conference Room B and we invite delegations to join this event.

I thank you.