

**Statement of Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs of
Austria
Dr. Ursula Plassnik**

**First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 Review Conference
of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**

30. April 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Dear Delegates,

I welcome you to this First Session of the Non Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee in Vienna. Allow me first to congratulate you, Ambassador Amano, on your election as Chair.

I am honoured that Vienna was chosen for this Session of the Preparatory Committee. With the IAEA, the CTBTO and the UN's Office for Drugs and Crime, Vienna has developed into a veritable competence center for security issues with a focus on the crucial subjects of *monitoring, verification and assistance*. The fact that we are here in Vienna today reflects the growing attention to these "Vienna issues" - and their increasing importance in the field of international security.

Let me in this context pay a special tribute to the International Atomic Energy Agency IAEA, which looks back on half a century of reliability and technical expertise this year. For five decades, the Agency has fulfilled its many duties in an efficient and discreet manner. So discreet in fact, that somehow I have the impression that public opinion is sometimes not enough aware of its many accomplishments and rewards, such as the Nobel Peace Prize.

The German EU Presidency will convey the EU Position in detail. Let me therefore share some personal thoughts with you on this occasion:

Let us not mince words: The NPT is in a serious crisis today. The last review conference in 2005 was an utter failure. The task ahead of us is enormous, the prospects for progress are minimal – and this is still a euphemism.

I think the PrepCom should not address only technicalities. Let me recapitulate the bleak facts:

In today's world there are 435 nuclear power plants; about a dozen countries have or are creating enrichment facilities; approximately 40 countries are said to have the technical expertise necessary to produce nuclear weapons.

There are grave concerns about the misuse of peaceful nuclear programmes to develop nuclear weapons. People are upset about the open disregard for disarmament obligations. We increasingly worry about how to deal with illicit trade in sensitive nuclear technology, black markets and nuclear terrorism.

On the other hand, a number of developing countries claim that they are unjustly denied access to the nuclear fuel cycle. Energy hunger, energy security, the need to respond to the rapid climate change force us to act: Let us be clear: The world is turning to nuclear energy for many reasons – like it or not. Add to this an increasing lack of trust among States.

The Austrian position is well known. Austria does not consider nuclear power a sustainable source of energy. We have therefore renounced the use of nuclear energy. Nevertheless, we are extremely interested in nuclear safety and we are looking for ways to overcome the lack of trust that has somehow become characteristic of the situation.

How can we address this situation?

In discussions with colleagues over the past months one possible strategy was identified that might contribute to establish effective cooperation, and this is what I want to propose today: Let us revive the debate on multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle.

You are all well aware of the basic idea: Concern about the misuse of sensitive products or technologies can be effectively addressed by multilateralizing them. Arguably, some of today's international tensions could have been avoided in this form if the fuel cycle was generally transparent and under strict multilateral control.

Let me turn to one example that worked in history. Fifty years ago, after the disastrous experience of World War II, the rebuilding of mutual trust in Europe was based on multilateral cooperation and control in sensitive industrial sectors such as coal and steel. This new foundation, the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community that eventually developed into the European Union, made it possible to overcome the distrust by an ever-closer integration.

Clearly, the model of European integration is unique in history and I am not suggesting we transform the world into a Union. But it is clear that the multilateralization of sensitive products and technologies can create durable trust and confidence among States.

Why not take up this idea and try to create an international mechanism, in which full transparency and mutual control act as catalysts for a new, stronger foundation of trust.

A first track could be devoted to optimizing international transparency going beyond current IAEA safeguard obligations. All States should declare to the IAEA and to each other all their existing nuclear programmes and future development plans. This exchange of information should take place through the IAEA which would also take care of the necessary security and confidentiality measures.

In parallel, a second track should enable equal access to and control of the most sensitive technologies of the nuclear fuel cycle, in particular enrichment and reprocessing activities. This could be achieved by placing all transactions regarding nuclear fuel under the auspices of a Nuclear Fuel Bank. Such a bank, which could well be established in a developing country, would ensure, monitor and verify safe, secure and fair distribution. All States that fulfil the necessary objective criteria would be able to obtain the nuclear fuel they need from this institution.

There would be no dependency or reliance on individual States to supply fuel, no more concerns over unequal distribution in times of energy shortages. But most of all, there should be no longer concern about potential misuse of fuel since all the relevant technology would be under multilateral control.

Again, let me mention that Austria does not consider nuclear power as a sustainable source of energy. My proposal is certainly not to promote the use of nuclear energy but to contribute to nuclear safety and to give a fresh impetus to our non-proliferation agenda.

In my view this could be a strong incentive to refrain from national enrichment and reprocessing activity. There would be no longer a division in "haves" and "have-nots": Together with other States every State abiding by the rules would have equal access to technology.

These ideas, though bold, are not new. There have been a number of proposals of this kind, going back to 1946. Various concepts were discussed in the 70s and 80s and only last year at the IAEA General Conference. But I do believe time is ripe to revise and revive this debate with vigour also in the NPT context.

It is only timely to do so at the beginning of a new Review Cycle and we should not, as I said, spend the PrepCom on tactics and technicalities alone. Let us be ambitious and find approaches - no matter if old or new - to allay suspicions and diffuse tensions and to work towards mutual trust and confidence. On that foundation, many of the current issues of the NPT should become easier to manage or even to solve.

By focusing on such a future-oriented agenda, I hope that the "Vienna spirit" of consensus, dialogue and openness will prevail throughout this Session and make it a lasting success. Thank you.