

# AUSTRIA



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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

**Statement**

**by**

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**at the**

**General Debate of the First Committee**

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Mr. Chairman,

Austria aligns itself with the general statement delivered last week for the European Union to which we would like to add the following aspects from a national perspective.

At this year's General Assembly, we can look back to a year of momentous developments in the field of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Some developments are encouraging, others are deeply concerning.

Among the negative developments is the continued build up of nuclear weapons and missiles capabilities by the DPRK, culminating in a third nuclear test last February. Austria strongly condemns this test as well as other provocative actions and urges the DPRK to change its course of action. We also remain seriously concerned about the Iranian nuclear issue. We very much hope that the new government in Teheran will follow through on the recent positive signals in a way that addresses all the concerns of the international community as regards the nature of its nuclear program.

The most troubling development this year, however, was the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Austria categorically condemns this unacceptable violation of international law and international humanitarian law. While nothing will undo this indiscriminate killing of civilians with weapons of mass destruction (WMD), we must focus on resolve that such actions cannot be repeated in the future. We hope that the agreed process for the destruction of chemical weapons will proceed swiftly and that the international norm enshrined in the CWC will emerge strengthened as a result of this tragedy. We welcome in this context the decision to award this year's Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW. It underscores the crucial importance of a comprehensive prohibition and full destruction of WMD through a multilateral arrangement.

Mr. Chairman,

In Austria's view, the recent use of chemical weapons and the sincere international outcry that followed should be reason enough to reflect more broadly on the place of weapons of mass destruction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the entire international community rightly underscored that there is no scenario in which the use of chemical weapons could be justifiable, we also need to think this thought to the end. As devastating as the effects of chemical weapons are, they are dwarfed by the consequences that the use of nuclear weapons would cause. These WMD are still considered by some states as legitimate and as "ultimate guarantors of security". In our view, the inconsistency is obvious and the conclusion clear: all WMD – particularly nuclear weapons – are relicts of the past that cannot be reconciled with today's understanding of international law and international humanitarian law (IHL). They should have no place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we need to redouble our efforts for a world without nuclear weapons or any other WMD.

We are therefore pleased that the discourse about nuclear weapons has shifted. The increased focus on their humanitarian consequences was long overdue. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of their use by design, miscalculation, accident or madness remains real. Any use of nuclear weapons would cause unthinkable humanitarian emergencies and have catastrophic global consequences on the environment, climate, health, social order, human development and the economy. Austria was pleased to participate in the international conference on this matter in Norway earlier this year and we look forward to next year's follow up conference in Mexico and to continuing and deepening this important discourse.

Mr. Chairman,

Austria remains fully committed to the NPT, which has served the international community well in the past four decades. We must recognize, however, that its credibility is seriously challenged. It is challenged as an effective means to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons; it is challenged as a credible framework to achieve nuclear disarmament and, without universality, it is challenged as a security and confidence building instrument in regional contexts. The universal goals that underpin the NPT will only be achieved if all these challenges are addressed with urgency.

Austria has always supported the most stringent non-proliferation rules. However, the focus on proliferation is not sufficient. As long as some states regard nuclear weapons as a legitimate security hedge for themselves, efforts to counter nuclear proliferation will always suffer from a fundamental contradiction and credibility deficit. Both the possession of nuclear weapons and reliance on nuclear deterrence are drivers for proliferation. The conclusion is clear: nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts can only be achieved together.

The Action Plan agreed to at the 2010 Review Conference underscores this urgency and would, if implemented credibly, put us on a right track to achieve nuclear disarmament and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Less than two years away from the 2015 Review Conference, we are concerned about the limited progress in the implementation of the Action Plan. Our concerns relate to the progress towards entry into force of the CTBT, the continued dysfunction of the Conference on Disarmament and, in particular, to plans for massive long term investments in the modernization of nuclear weapons in several nuclear weapons states. These are, in our view, not consistent with taking credible steps away from reliance on nuclear weapons that we see as key elements of the NPT disarmament agreements of 1995, 2000 and 2010. In this context, we welcome President Obama's recent pledge in Berlin to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures and we hope that such steps are taken with urgency before the next NPT Review Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

In 2010, the NPT Review Conference resolved that "all States parties commit to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons". This is Action 1 of the *conclusions and recommendations for follow on actions*. This key outcome of the 2010 Review Conference underscores that the implementation of all provisions of the NPT, including Art. 6, is a collective responsibility of the entire NPT membership. Several initiatives have been launched as a consequence of non-nuclear weapons states' commitment to facilitate a more focused implementation of our collective responsibilities. One of these initiatives was last year's resolution 67/56 that established an open-ended working group (OEWG) to develop proposals for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons.

The OEWG recently concluded its work in Geneva with the adoption by consensus of a substantive report reflecting the discussions held and all proposals made. One of the most significant aspects of the work of the Group was, in our view, the move beyond a discussion on approaches. It addressed the substantive elements that would be required for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons. The discussions were substantive, interesting, engaged, constructive, non-confrontational and focussed on assessing the various options of achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons. But beyond the substance, the Group also gave an opportunity to conduct these discussions in a more 21<sup>st</sup> Century way – open to all interested states and more interactive with excellent contributions of experts and civil society organizations. This kind of discussion has been missing in multilateral forums in recent years and is clearly required to achieve progress in

taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. A resolution will be introduced at this session to follow up on this matter.

Mr. Chairman,

Austria was very satisfied with the successful conclusion of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). It was without doubt one of the key positive developments of the past year and an important „sign of life“ of multilateral diplomacy in the arms control area. The role of civil society in this success cannot be valued highly enough and the more inclusive and open negotiation process in the General Assembly also facilitated rather than impeded progress. Now it is important to achieve entry into force as soon as possible. Austria has already signed the ATT and we plan to submit the treaty for ratification to the Austrian parliament in the next few months.

Mr. Chairman,

The protection of civilians in armed conflict and strengthening IHL have been longstanding Austrian priorities. Humanitarian disarmament instruments, such as the Mine Ban Convention and the Convention of Cluster Munitions have played a crucial role in strengthening the normative framework for the protection of civilians, through prevention of further loss of life and collective efforts for remedial measures. We call on all states that have not yet done so to join these important treaties.

Prevention and accountability for deliberate targeting of civilians during war, as well as disproportionate collateral casualties as a result of military action, are at the centre of our concern. Today, arms technology is undergoing rapid changes. The use of armed drones in conflict situations is increasing. In a not too distant future, fully autonomous weapons systems might become available. As a result, the implications of these developments on IHL require urgent engagement by relevant UN forums and further discussion with a view to ensure that these weapons will not be used in a way that violates universally recognized principles of IHL such as the proportionality of the use of force or the obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants.

We also continue to be very preoccupied by the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. We take note of the view expressed by the ICRC that the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area must be avoided in densely populated areas. We welcome the call of the UNSG to the SC and to member States to recognize and act on this critical issue.

Let me close, Mr. Chairman, by reiterating Austria's strong commitment to multilateral cooperation in the field of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.

Thank You