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**General Statement
by**

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**at the
Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference
of the Parties to the Treaty
on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**

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At the outset let me congratulate you on assuming the chairmanship over this important conference and I assure you of the full support of the Austrian delegation in your efforts to steer this meeting towards a successful outcome.

Austria is aligned with the statement of the European Union and the statement of the Vienna Group of 10.

Chairperson,

In 1968, the drafters of the NPT wisely decided to establish a forum to ensure the effective implementation of the treaty - the cornerstone of the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. The ten years since we last made progress in this forum have brought about drastic change:

A decade ago nuclear disarmament seemed on an upward trajectory: large stockpile reductions by some of the nuclear weapon States continued, and ambitious plans for further progress were drafted, based in part on the realization of the humanitarian dangers of these weapons.

In 2019, nuclear disarmament appears to have flatlined – if not reversed. And in addition, the international security situation has deteriorated, with ever lower levels of mutual confidence and the erosion of existing instruments to manage conflicts and avoid escalation. Taken together, today, the threat of a nuclear weapon being used is higher than it has been in generations, as High Representative Nakamitsu has pointed out. What makes the situation worse is the lack of trust between the two countries that hold about 90% of the nuclear weapons arsenal. We need a constructive dialogue, not two parallel monologues about the other instead of with the other.

Take the INF treaty: Despite its tangible contribution to the implementation of Art. VI and its positive impact on security, in particular in Europe, the treaty might cease to be in force by August 2019. The declaration of the suspension of compliance with the obligations under the INF by the United States and the Russian Federation as well as the declaration of withdrawal under Article XV under the INF Treaty runs counter to the implementation of the NPT's Article VI obligations. Similarly, the very positive achievements of the New START treaty might be in peril, as it remains unclear whether the treaty will be extended beyond 2021 and later replaced by a successor instrument bringing further reductions.

Taken together with unconscionably expensive nuclear arsenal upgrade- and modernization programmes, aimed at retaining nuclear weapons for the indefinite future and the development of systems to ease delivery of nuclear weapons, there is now a clear trajectory towards a renewed arms race.

The continued possession and modernisation of nuclear arsenals, and claims that certain states' security requires nuclear weapons, both directly contradict given commitments and have real proliferation implications, they can encourage others to pursue their own nuclear weapons programmes.

Chairperson,

The risks inherent in these abhorrent weapons have not decreased, but rather continue to increase. Accidental nuclear weapon detonations remain a very real danger. Malfunctions, false alarms and misinterpreted information have led to numerous instances in which an accidental nuclear detonation has hung on a razor's edge. Developments in new technologies, from Artificial Intelligence to Cyber-threats, increase vulnerabilities, shorten decision-times, heighten the risk of accidental or unintended detonation and add to the dangers of miscalculation.

Since the 2010 Review Conference, we have gained substantial additional information on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons through the three conferences in Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna, which led to the joint statement by 159 countries presented at the 2015 Review Conference. These conferences accumulated evidence on how any use of a nuclear weapon would have a disastrous, far-reaching and long-term impact. Let me draw delegates' attention to working paper 44 on this issue submitted by Austria in the name of more than 30 states. The reality of these catastrophic consequences compels us to pursue progress on nuclear disarmament with greater urgency and to examine current trends, and the implications of new technologies, through a humanitarian lens, focused on the security of human beings, rather than relying on abstract security concepts. Austria will co-host a side event on this on 8 May at 1.15pm, including specifically the impact of new technologies.

Chairperson,

The NPT is only as strong as our multilateral system. It requires full implementation, as well as full compliance, to remain effective. Treaties have collapsed, or are under serious threat of doing so, due to issues of non-compliance. Attempts by nuclear weapon States to narrowly interpret central provisions, concretely Article VI, call in question their commitment to the treaty's grand bargain. Indeed, others may follow suit and interpret obligations also under the other pillars equally as narrowly. It is of the highest importance that all States Parties fully comply with the NPT in its entirety. These dangerous trends of reduced or non-compliance are eroding trust in individual treaties and in the disarmament and non-proliferation regime as a whole - including the NPT as its cornerstone. Austria, together with other countries has submitted a paper to the conference on implementation and compliance with the NPT.

The DPRK's nuclear and missile programmes are of grave concern. The DPRK must return to compliance with its international obligations under UN Security Council resolutions, the NPT and IAEA, and should ratify the CTBT without delay. Given positive signs over the last year, we hope continued efforts will produce concrete results and encourage all parties concerned to continue build trust and agree on the path towards a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.

The JCPOA is critical for reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and globally. We therefore regret the withdrawal of the United States. We call on Iran to continue to abide by its obligations, as verified by the IAEA. We reiterate our commitment to work with the international community to preserve the nuclear deal.

Chairperson,

The NPT treaty was conceived as a framework. Its short text requires further legal provisions for effective implementation to achieve its goals. This has been achieved in the non-proliferation and peaceful uses pillars through numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements and treaties. Let me mention the CTBT, a momentous treaty for non-proliferation that also has a positive impact on disarmament. Austria urges all annex II countries to bring the CTBT into force.

In the disarmament pillar, several bilateral agreements have enabled substantial progress by the two largest nuclear weapon states. However, no multilateral treaties

had been adopted to implement Art. VI of the NPT – until 2017, when 122 countries decided to take the historic step to implement Art. VI by closing the legal gap in international law through a legally-binding norm to prohibit nuclear weapons. This is generally accepted to be required for the full implementation of Article VI, as without it, a world free of nuclear weapons cannot be achieved or maintained.

The TPNW of course will not be able to make nuclear weapons disappear overnight – and indeed none of its supporters have ever claimed this. Rather, it is an essential element, that needs to be followed by others in order to achieve and maintain the world free of nuclear weapons we all committed to in the NPT.

The TPNW is well on its way to entry into force, nearing the half-way point. We warmly welcome the most recent ratifications and signatures and call on all remaining states to sign and ratify the treaty and thereby strengthen the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Over the last years the role of international organizations and civil society has become increasingly important in setting and implementing the rules based global order. Austria welcomes the expertise and engagement of the ICRC, civil society and academics enriching our joint efforts. The important contributions of our partners to international peace and security have been highlighted by awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons twenty years after the International Campaign to Ban Landmines was Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Chairperson,

Let me conclude with a remark on peaceful uses:

Austria fully acknowledges the inalienable right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy as established by article IV of the NPT. This does however not entail a commitment of States party to the NPT to use nuclear energy for power generation, or to support and promote such use by others. Rather, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 favoured national policies using an appropriate energy mix based on individual national circumstances. In line with this principle, Austria has chosen not to use nuclear energy for power generation. It is our assessment that the risk of accidents at nuclear power stations, as exemplified e.g. by the tragic incidents in Tschernobyl 33 years ago and more recently Fukushima, is bigger than the potential

benefits this particular application of nuclear energy brings. Also the problem of the safe and long-term disposal of radioactive waste has not been solved yet in a satisfactory manner. And especially with regard to the current trend to introduce nuclear power into some energy-rich regions where it has not been present yet. Historically peaceful programmes have in a number of cases been the point of departure for military nuclear programmes. States that do choose to use nuclear energy for power generation notwithstanding should do so applying the highest standards of safety, security, waste management and non-proliferation possible.

Chairperson,

My delegation will support you in your endeavours to facilitate further progress, such as taking the necessary procedural decisions, as we approach the Review Conference in 2020. Together we can make it, when all of us have the political will.