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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Speech by H.E. Alexander Schallenberg

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to **address you on behalf of Austria** at the occasion of the **International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**. **Complete nuclear disarmament is a top foreign policy priority of Austria.**

Austria was one of the first countries to sign the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**. Therefore, this day is of special significance for Austria. Let us be frank: **Nuclear disarmament has in practice ground to halt** and – worse – is being **partially reversed**. **The threat for a nuclear confrontation has increased:**

The **end of the INF Treaty** endangers peace and security worldwide. In Europe, it reduces the reaction time for nuclear attacks to mere minutes. There is a **danger that the New START Treaty will lapse**. The **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action**, a diplomatic breakthrough in non-proliferation, is hanging at a thread.

To make things worse, new nuclear weapons are being developed costing hundreds of billions of dollars with the aim of making them even more lethal. Even so-called **small tactical nuclear weapons**, designed to be **“more useable”** are of a similar size to those detonated over **Hiroshima and Nagasaki**. **New delivery systems** are being deployed reducing reaction times and increasing the risks for fatal errors and escalation.

This despite the fact that the **concept of nuclear deterrence** simply does not **stand up to scrutiny**. We all know that. These weapons pose an **existential threat to all states** because their **catastrophic humanitarian consequences respect no borders**.

The deterrence argument also **ignores recent technological developments**. Are current systems sufficiently shielded against cyber-attacks? Can nuclear weapons be hacked? How do we deal with the weaponization of artificial intelligence?

We all have to be aware that all these developments and challenges **exponentially increase the risk of escalation and miscalculation.**

Ladies and gentlemen,

The case for the total elimination of nuclear weapons is clear. And it is one that is **supported by the majority of countries: 122** of them voted two years ago for the adoption of the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.** A historic breakthrough.

Today, we have **crossed the halfway-point to the 50 ratifications required** for the entry into force. **With every additional signature and ratification,** states send the powerful signal that **having a say** on nuclear weapons is **not exclusive to states who possess them.** The security of all our citizens is equally important and equally at risk. We are, of course, **under no illusion** that the Treaty will immediately reduce risks or decimate nuclear weapons stockpiles. But it is an essential step. **Let us not lose heart.**

Just as with the **Ottawa Convention** on anti-personnel mines or the **Convention on Cluster Munitions** the **road ahead** of us is still long. But if we **continue to act together** we will finally achieve our goal: to prohibit and eliminate the most dangerous class of weapons of mass destruction.

I call on all states to sign and ratify the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** and to contribute to building a world free of nuclear weapons.

I thank you for your attention.