



# Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations in Geneva

## Statement to the Conference on Disarmament

27 January 2026

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Permanent Representative of Austria

Madam President,

Thank you for your kind words of welcome, and allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the first presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2026. We also commend the former Mexican presidency for its inclusive efforts in connection with last year's UN General Assembly resolution.

It is a pleasure for me to be back in Geneva after having been posted here, 26 years ago, as a much younger diplomat serving as Deputy Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament. As I continue to engage with the broader UN ecosystem in Geneva, the disarmament community has always held a special place in my heart. Yet, while I am very pleased to be back in the CD, it is also a sobering experience.

Twenty-six years ago, the Conference had already been unable to agree on a Programme of Work for three years. At that time, there were still many CD delegates who had participated in the negotiations on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. A sustained and high-calibre diplomatic effort was underway to overcome the stalemate and to bring the CD back to fulfilling its mandate. I recall discussions on the so-called "Amorim Proposal," named after Ambassador and former foreign minister Celso Amorim of Brazil, as well as subsequent refined proposals for a Programme of Work. Frequently, the CD was referred to as "the most exclusive club in town."

Many years of stalemate and dysfunction later, the Conference finds itself in an even more precarious state. The CD is no longer perceived as *exclusive*, but rather as an *excluding* and undemocratic forum, constrained by anachronistic rules of procedure, veto mindsets, obstructionist attitudes, and a lack of political will. It has become all too easy to assign blame for the status quo to others or to suggest that deteriorating geopolitical conditions make progress impossible. In doing so, parts of the membership appear to have lost sight of the mandate and *raison d'être* of the Conference — namely, to serve as a multilateral negotiating forum.

The re-establishment of deliberative subsidiary bodies, without progress toward negotiations and while observer requests continue to be blocked, does not constitute fulfilment of the CD's

mandate. On the contrary, it undermines the very logic on which the Conference was established with limited membership. We therefore urge all members to reflect seriously and focus on what can be done to reinvigorate the CD as a negotiating body, rather than allowing it to become merely another forum for deliberation.

Madam President,

My delegation is convinced that now more than ever we must do everything possible to strengthen the United Nations, multilateralism, and international law, and to continue investing in the disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation regime — including this Conference. Without doubt, the urgency of such negotiations and the importance of easing tensions and strengthening trust and confidence is higher today than at almost any other time and in the vital security interest of all.

Mechanisms of collective security created to address and manage the current challenges are struggling, and in some cases failing. Maximalist, unilateralist, and frequently obstructionist approaches increasingly render progress toward multilateral solutions all but impossible. Those most responsible for these developments are often also the most vocal in questioning international law and the value of multilateralism itself.

We witness blatant violations of international law and the UN Charter through wars of aggression – such as by Russia in Ukraine –, unacceptable nuclear rhetoric, and too many conflicts that are characterized by an alarming disregard for international humanitarian law, with devastating consequences for civilian populations. Heightened geopolitical tensions and threat perceptions are accelerating arms race dynamics in both nuclear and conventional weapons, as well as in new and disruptive technologies and in outer space. These developments fuel a widening sense of insecurity, prompting many States to increase military spending, which has reached record levels. History shows us where this path leads if it is not accompanied by an equally determined effort toward diplomacy, confidence-building, tension reduction, and cooperation. In this context, the erosion of the disarmament and arms control architecture, combined with narrowing of security approaches towards predominantly militarized perspectives of security, is particularly alarming.

Madam President,

In no area are these developments more concerning than with regard to nuclear weapons, to which Austria continues to attach particular importance and which I will focus on in today's statement. Later today, the Doomsday Clock will be set for 2026, but it is already evident that nuclear risks are higher than they have been in decades. There is a nuclear dimension in almost every current conflict or crisis. The erosion of norms, the weakening of the nuclear taboo, the modernization and expansion of arsenals, unacceptable nuclear threats, opacity, and a lack of transparency and accountability are driving mistrust and increasing proliferation pressures. We are approaching what appears to be the final phase of strategic nuclear arms control with

the impending expiration of the New START Treaty, which is of great concern. Above all, however, we are deeply concerned by the renewed and growing emphasis on nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence in various regions of the world as – allegedly - essential elements of security.

A growing body of scientific research demonstrates that the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons and their inherent risks are far more serious, cumulative, complex, transboundary, and long-lasting than previously understood. Any use of nuclear weapons would result in catastrophic humanitarian and security consequences, overwhelming response capacities and endangering the security of all humanity. Beyond the immediate devastation, such use would produce global effects and severe short- and long-term impacts on current and future generations.

Given these grave consequences, nuclear weapons — and their role as an “essential” means of providing security and stability for those who possess or rely on them — represents a direct and critical threat to the security of other States, humanity as a whole, and our shared planet. This is not an abstract threat. The readiness to use nuclear weapons and to inflict, if necessary, catastrophic global consequences is not an unfortunate byproduct of nuclear deterrence. It is its foundation. This threat is further exacerbated by the increasing salience of nuclear weapons in doctrines and postures, the qualitative modernization and quantitative expansion of arsenals, and heightened geopolitical tensions. Moreover, portraying nuclear weapons as indispensable security “guarantees” fuels proliferation and undermines the global non-proliferation regime, thereby further increasing security risks.

Despite the claims of its proponents, there is no certainty regarding the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence, nor for its ineffectiveness. What is undisputed, however, is that deterrence can fail. It is fundamentally a psychological and communicative construct, reliant on assumptions of stability, predictability and rationality. In essence, it is a theory and not a “guarantee”. The ability of nuclear-armed states to control escalation and to avoid miscalculation or accidents is highly uncertain. History provides ample evidence of near misses, accidents, miscalculations, and narrow escapes. Assertions that nuclear deterrence has prevented major conflict in the past are impossible to prove conclusively and, in any case, offer no assurance that it will function as assumed in the future.

The permanent threat of mass destruction inherent in nuclear deterrence runs counter to the legitimate security interests of humanity as a whole. It represents a dangerous, misguided, and ultimately unsustainable approach to security. If we genuinely seek undiminished security for all, we must move away from paradigms based on the global threat of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons are the exact opposite undiminished security for all.

Madam President,

The security concerns outlined above are profound, legitimate, and widely shared among non-nuclear-weapon States. They are grounded in scientific evidence and form the foundation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In the current context of heightened geopolitical tensions, serious engagement with these arguments and with the available scientific evidence on the consequences and risks of nuclear weapons is ever more urgent. Nuclear deterrence and the inherent uncertainties and risks of this concept should be subject to far more critical scrutiny.

This year offers important opportunities for such engagement, including the NPT Review Conference, the TPNW Review Conference, and here in the Conference on Disarmament. The extent to which differing security perceptions can be addressed constructively in order to forge a more common path forward in dealing with the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons is a key challenge for international security and for the future of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Madam President,

In conclusion, Austria remains firmly convinced that it is in the vital security interest of all States to strengthen multilateral institutions, uphold established norms, fully implement treaty obligations, and continue shaping the future multilateral disarmament regime. Let me assure you of my delegation's continued engagement in discussions on both the working arrangements of the Conference and, should the CD finally be ready once again, on substantive negotiations.

Thank you.