

AUSTRIA



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General Debate

Statement by the Republic of Austria

delivered by

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Chair,

Congratulations on your election. Austria aligns with the EU statement.

Chair,

It would be easy to be pessimistic. The NPT Review Conference failed to agree an outcome for the third time in a row. Wars are fought with drones and algorithms faster than we agree on rules for them.

But crisis is often where diplomacy begins. The Partial Test Ban Treaty was signed less than a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis. The NPT was negotiated at the height of the Cold War. And the CTBT was opened for signature thirty years ago. Multilateral diplomacy is not a fair-weather instrument. It was built for storms like the one we are in.

Chair,

Nowhere is the gap between technology and regulation wider than on **autonomous weapons systems**. Weapons that select and strike targets without meaningful human control are a reality on today's battlefields.

The warnings could not be clearer. The Secretary-General and the ICRC President renewed their joint call for binding rules – a call we echo. The High Commissioner for Human Rights joined calls for "the urgent prohibition of weapons that can take lives without human involvement". The Emergency Relief Coordinator warned that humans are losing control of weapons. Last month, the heads of leading AI companies asked the Security Council for international safeguards. Diplomacy must catch up.

The consensus adoption by the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS of a set of elements of an instrument is a real achievement, even though important elements and safeguards were removed at the final stage. The CCW Review Conference in November must now take the next step: a mandate to negotiate a legally binding instrument.

Austria with a cross-regional group will again introduce a resolution on autonomous weapons systems, that was supported by 164 States last year. It aims to keep up momentum towards regulation, build capacity and address aspects not addressed in the CCW. We invite all delegations to co-sponsor it, and to join our side event together with UNIDIR and UNITAR on 21 October on the risk of proliferation of LAWS, including to non-State actors.

Chair,

Nuclear risks are rising, arsenals growing and doctrines expanding. Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest terms, has compounded these risks. And artificial intelligence may be entering nuclear command and control. Pending the elimination of nuclear weapons, human control and oversight over these systems must be real, not nominal, as demanded by the General Assembly last year. We

are alarmed about the increase of strident and unacceptable nuclear rhetoric. We condemn any nuclear threats, whether explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances.

These risks are built into a security paradigm that rests on the threat of mass destruction. Nuclear deterrence asks all of humanity to accept the risk of catastrophe as the price of security for a few. That is a legitimate security concern for the vast majority of States.

101 States have now signed or ratified the **TPNW**, more than half the UN membership., Austria is proud to have contributed as a universalization co-chair,. The Treaty has also driven new evidence on the cascading humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons and new approaches to verification.

We invite all States to support our joint resolutions on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the TPNW.

Chair,

Thirty years on, the **CTBT** has built a near-universal norm against nuclear testing, backed by a monitoring system that exceeds expectations. But many monitoring stations are reaching the end of their lifespan, and we hear allegations of non-compliance and talk of resuming tests. Both need active answers, including possible new technologies. Our side event this Friday lunchtime will examine the origins of the zero-yield standard and the technical questions involved. Any nuclear test explosion, by anyone, would be a grave step backwards.

Chair,

The NPT Review Conference and the IAEA General Conference both showed how urgently we must address **attacks on peaceful nuclear facilities**. Radiation knows no borders, so this concerns all of us. It must be addressed on a factual, non-politicised basis, grounded in international law and the expertise of the IAEA. Austria co-hosted a side event at the General Conference last month on the legal, normative and scientific dimensions of the issue. Peaceful nuclear facilities have special protections that must be respected.

Chair,

When **explosive weapons are used in populated areas**, around nine in ten of those killed and injured are civilians. Children pay a terrible price. Hospitals, schools, water and power systems are destroyed, and the harm continues decades after the fighting ends.

The EWIPA Declaration is a core instrument to prevent and mitigate this harm. 92 States have endorsed it, and we call on all others to join. What is needed now is change in military policy and practice on the ground. Austria continues to focus on implementation, such as the EWIPA military workshops in Geneva and Accra this year.

The **Anti-Personal Mine Ban Convention** and the **Convention on Cluster Munitions** have brought remarkable achievements in saving lives, assisting victims and bringing economic prosperity to affected communities. This success is now in danger of being reversed. We must engage urgently to ensure that the strong stigma against these inherently indiscriminate weapons is being upheld.

As President of the Fourteenth Meeting of States Parties to the **Convention on Cluster Munitions**, Austria will work with the CCM community to bring the Vientiane Capital Action Plan to life, universalize and implement the CCM effectively and engage survivors in all activities under the Convention.

Chair,

In January, Austria joins the **Security Council**. We will carry the concerns of this Committee into the Council: the protection of civilians and upholding of IHL, the engagement on the risks of new technologies, and a strong disarmament and non-proliferation regime. And we will bring more of Vienna to New York and vice versa.

Chair,

Thirty years ago, the world chose to end nuclear testing. Today, we can choose to keep humans in control of the use of force, to protect civilians in urban warfare, and to move away from the threat of weapons of mass destruction. Austria is ready.

Thank you.