UNGA Resolution 77/52, Submission by Austria

Austria welcomes the opportunity to submit its views for consideration by the United Nations Secretary-General, pursuant to UNGA resolution 77/52 “United Nations study on disarmament and non-proliferation education”.

Austria is deeply committed to promoting disarmament education and actively engages with a wide range of stakeholders to foster understanding and awareness of disarmament issues. Through organizing international conferences, commissioning research, and collaborating with educational institutions, Austria aims to build a robust foundation for informed policy-making and global cooperation in disarmament efforts:

- On 29 and 30 April 2024, Austria convened the international conference “Humanity at the Crossroads: Autonomous Weapons Systems and the Challenge of Regulation” in Vienna. Over 1000 participants from states, the UN system, the ICRC, international and regional organisations, the tech sector and industry, academia and civil society, including delegates from 144 states, participated in this so far largest global gathering on the specific issue of autonomous weapons systems. This conference made a significant contribution to education on this critical topic, fostering awareness and understanding among various stakeholders. Additionally, several school classes and a cohort of students currently enrolled in a number of universities attended the conference, underscoring the importance of engaging the younger generation in discussions about emerging technologies and their regulation. Furthermore, the conference was live streamed to the broader public.

- The 2022 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons (HINW22Vienna) took place on 20 June 2022. The international conference organized by Austria brought together about 800 state representatives, international organisations, the scientific community, survivors of nuclear weapons use or testing and civil society to present established and new research on the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons. The conference was an inclusive event comprised of expert panels and presentations. Building on the Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo (March 2013), Nayarit (February 2014) and Vienna (December 2014), the HINW22Vienna provided an overview of their findings and discussions, and provided additional insight and new research conducted since then. The aim was to advance the common factual and scientific foundation for the global discussion on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Austria organised this conference in the hope of further engaging with the scientific evidence and the substantive arguments underlying the humanitarian impact and risks of nuclear weapons.

- In the framework of focusing attention on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons, the Austrian Foreign Ministry commissioned an overview of new studies in this field. The goal of this workstream is to increase the understanding these complex consequences and risks to support diplomatic work on nuclear disarmament. The study also intends to help establish a common factual basis for international negotiations and a shift away from nuclear deterrence. The resulting brochure by Dr. Nick Ritchie and Mikhail Kupriyanov of the University of York compiles academic research of the past 15 years on the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons and was published in July 2023. It provides an overview of the additional data and knowledge generated by new research and the application of new technologies and methods. These relate in particular to the impact on the environment and the complex humanitarian consequences. The study furthermore also includes studies on the impact of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and on nuclear decision-making. The study was presented in various relevant international fora. Both the study and a recording of its first presentation are available online at the Austrian Foreign Ministry’s homepage.
• In 2022, Austria supported the NGO Atomic reporters in organizing a citizen journalism/social media outreach programme to cover the 2022 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons (HINW22Vienna). It was targeted at younger audiences to draw their attention to the conference and the events during the unprecedented week of nuclear disarmament meetings surrounding HINW22Vienna with the goal of sharing knowledge and raising awareness about nuclear risks.

• On 15-16 September 2021, Austria organised a two-day international Conference to Maintain Human Control in Autonomous Weapon Systems in a virtual format. During the two-day virtual conference, representatives from the fields of science, research, politics, and civil society discussed the challenge of ensuring a minimum standard for human control at the international level. This conference provided an educational platform for diverse stakeholders to explore and understand the complexities of maintaining human oversight over autonomous systems. It significantly contributed to disarmament education by promoting knowledge sharing and capacity building among participants, which are essential for effective regulation and control of autonomous weapons. Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg, together with Izumi Nakamitsu, United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Gilles Carbonnier, Vice President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Phil Twyford, New Zealand’s Minister of Disarmament, opened the virtual conference on the current challenges of increasingly autonomous weapon systems, contributing to the global discourse and knowledge base on the topic.

• Austria strongly and consistently supports various initiatives by academia, civil society and international organisations in the field of disarmament education: Austria is a major supporter of the Vienna Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP, www.vcdnp.org), which was established on Austrian initiative in 2011. Annually, Austria provides the VCDNP with financial support, thereby ensuring the continuation of its educational programs and research initiatives. Since its establishment, Austria supports the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs’ work in furthering disarmament education and advancing liaison and dialogue on key issues facing multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control and provides significant financial support. Currently, two projects are funded: 1) Strengthening and expanding UNODA Vienna Disarmament Education and Outreach efforts and 2) Informing, educating, engaging, empowering: expanding UNODA’s e-learning platform. Regarding civil society, Austria supported the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) on a national as well as international level, and funded a project with the aim to raise awareness of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, e.g. workshops at universities to transfer knowledge, raise awareness and deepen knowledge of the TPNW. Additionally, Austria financially supported International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor, Stop Killer Robots and Article 36. Austria is committed to promoting disarmament education and actively collaborates with universities and schools to foster a deeper understanding of disarmament issues on a regular basis. Through various initiatives, including workshops and lectures, Austria aims to engage students and academics in the discourse on disarmament.