UNGA Resolution 78/240, Submission by Austria

Austria welcomes the opportunity to submit its views for consideration by the United Nations Secretary-General, pursuant to UNGA resolution 78/240 “Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons”.

Nuclear disarmament, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and urgently achieving a world free of weapons of mass destruction are a priority of Austria’s foreign and security policy. Austria takes the position that only the complete elimination and stigmatisation of such weapons can put a halt to their proliferation and the inherent risks, as well as catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences. In support of the international efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons, Austria, like many other States, stresses the need to put these factors and the fact that the risks and consequences concern all states at the centre of all deliberations.

Austria is proud to be a leading advocate of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), especially in providing aid to affected communities and states. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on January 22, 2021. Austria held the presidency of the first Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW, which took place in Vienna from June 21 to 23, 2022. The States Parties adopted a Declaration and an Action Plan during this meeting, furthering the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Austria remains committed to the effective and comprehensive implementation of the Vienna Action Plan and at the Second Meeting of States Parties in 2023 was entrusted with the role of coordinator for the informal intersessional process on the development of common security perspectives of the TPNW states. Austria also organized a side event titled “Tracking progress towards a world without nuclear weapons”, which took place on 11 October 2023 on the side lines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 78).

In June 2022, Austria organized the fourth international Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons (HINW22) in Vienna, which presented new scientific findings on the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons, with the participation of over 80 states. This conference followed conferences in Oslo, Nayarit (both 2013) and Vienna 2014. Austria also coordinated a statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons for the 2015 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which was co-sponsored by a total of 159 countries. Additionally, Austria organized a side event at the NPT RevCon 2022. The side event focused on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and was held on 17 August 2022.

In the framework of focusing on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons, the Austrian Foreign Ministry commissioned an overview of new studies in this field, which was published in July 2023. The goal was 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. It thus 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 inter alia includes studies on the impact of new
technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and on nuclear decision-making. At the margins of the NPT Preparatory Committee in August 2023 in Vienna, the brochure was presented for the first time. Furthermore, on 2 August 2023, Austria held a side event during the 2022 NPT RevCon in New York and presented the study’s findings.

Austria provides significant financial support to the Scientific Advisory Group of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) works on workshops at the 2024 Preparatory Committee for the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and events related to Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Austria emphasizes the importance of involving agencies such as the IAEA, ICRC, UNDP, CTBTO, and WHO in environmental assessment, remediation, and victim assistance efforts in collaboration with affected states.

Austria underscores the necessity for states to discuss victim assistance and environmental remediation in regional and international forums, including NPT PrepComs, the 2026 NPT Review Conference, the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, and the Third Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW.

Austria is committed to working closely bilaterally or through relevant organisations to facilitate affected states to provide initial assessments of the humanitarian, health, and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons, along with technical and scientific expertise. Austria considers this important in order to enable effective support in the framework of the TPNW on victim assistance and the rehabilitation of environmental damage caused by the use or testing of nuclear weapons, which has caused grave humanitarian problems in numerous states around the globe.

Additionally, Austria strongly calls for active engagement of all relevant international organisations, UN agencies, the scientific community, representatives of UNSCEAR, affected communities and other relevant actors to improve understanding of the humanitarian and environmental impact of nuclear use, testing and related activities.