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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Third Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

General exchange of views

Statement by the Republic of Austria

delivered by

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Mr President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Congratulations on your presidency and thank you personally and your country for your exemplary leadership on nuclear disarmament.

Mr President,

Yesterday, a new government was sworn in in Austria. The government manifesto puts a strong emphasis on engagement on peace and security, on the UN and multilateralism and on promoting these principles in line with our constitutional neutrality.

- It states that international law and human rights are at the centre of Austria's Foreign Policy.
- Underlines our candidature for the UN Security Council 2027-28.
- And emphasizes that Austria will remain a key promoter of disarmament efforts, in particular of the TPNW.

I am very pleased that the Third Meeting of States Parties gives us the opportunity to act on this objective so quickly together with our TPNW partners, States Parties, Signatories, and our colleagues from international organisations, the ICRC, civil society – including survivors – and academia. Let me also congratulate Nihon Hidankyo for the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize for their untiring efforts to highlight the terrible human suffering caused by nuclear weapons.

While a commitment to multilateralism may until recently have seemed like an obvious point. Today this can no longer be taken for granted. Today, the very principle of multilateral cooperation is at stake. This is unfortunately also the case for the multilateral disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation regime.

Mr President,

In a matter of a few years, international security has deteriorated into an almost unprecedented precarious situation of heightened geopolitical tensions and an erosion of trust.

We feel this acutely in Europe where the European Security architecture was shattered by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine with far-reaching repercussions on multilateralism, international law and international peace and security. In Asia and in the Middle East, there are other dangerous geopolitical "hot-spots". All these crises carry immense risks of escalation. All fuel arms race dynamics. All have a dangerous nuclear weapons dimension.

Arguments in favour of nuclear weapons, of the necessity of so-called "nuclear protection" and the "security benefit" of nuclear deterrence are gaining traction in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. International security looks precariously fragile. Our system of multilateral cooperation and collective security appears overwhelmed by this *multi-crisis*, driving arguments for nuclear weapons.

Mr President,

We understand and respect the security concerns of those who argue in favour of nuclear weapons – be it in our own region or elsewhere. However, what unites us in the TPNW is the conviction that nuclear weapons are not and can never be the answer. They are not a security guarantee. They offer an illusion of security that is based on the creation of unacceptable and existential risks for all of humanity.

This equation of *nuclear weapons* with *security* is the key challenge for TPNW States Parties. It has become much greater since the TPNW negotiations. We can see what more emphasis on nuclear weapons would lead to: more states with these weapons, greater arms race dynamics, more precarious fragility in international relations and higher risks of nuclear weapons use, miscalculations and accidents. This trajectory is greatly concerning for the non-nuclear majority who feel that their security is diminished by the reliance on a security paradigm based on the threat of mass destruction.

Mr President,

The so-called security benefit of nuclear weapons is uncertain and based on many assumptions. We simply cannot be certain that nuclear deterrence works – but we know for sure that it can fail. And, if it does, we have an increasing body of irrefutable scientific evidence that the humanitarian consequences would be grave and catastrophic for all, including on states not engaged in the nuclear gamble. This is not a sustainable basis on which to build international security.

Mr President,

Austria was honoured to facilitate a consultation process between the Second Meeting of States Parties and the Third Meeting of States Parties on exactly these key questions. The result is a comprehensive report which I will have the pleasure of presenting later in the week.

We must focus the international discourse on nuclear weapons on these different security perspectives. What kind of security are we talking about and security for whom? We need engagement of and with those who either deeply believe in nuclear deterrence or cannot see a way out of this paradigm. Regrettably, we have seen little readiness by some States to engage with the profound security concerns and arguments the TPNW puts forward. The belief in nuclear deterrence is obviously so entrenched that some States seem fundamentally opposed – almost afraid – to consider other perspectives. We would therefore like to acknowledge specifically those States who are allies of nuclear armed States who are here as observers of the MSP. We see this as a constructive sign of readiness to engage.

We hope that the report will facilitate more engagement with the legitimate and profound security concerns held by TPNW States.

Mr President,

We thank all office holders and the Scientific Advisory Board for their important work and for their reports which we will comment in more detail under the specific agenda items.

Mr President,

Against the overall disconcerting backdrop in international relations and on the nuclear weapons issue in particular, the TPNW is an indispensable ray of hope. It is the *one* international development and framework that points to an understanding of security not based on the threat of mass destruction. The TPNW is not a silver bullet for today's or future security challenges, but nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence are neither. And they are most definitely not a sustainable solution. In these extremely dangerous times we need leadership and cooperation. The TPNW is a constructive and serious investment into international law and the common security of all. We must do everything we can to strengthen it.

Thank you.