

Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs

Austria

H.E. Alexander Schallenberg

Conference on Disarmament, 28.06.19

Mr President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

This year we celebrate the centenary of the League of Nations. Over the last 100 years, we have established multilateral forums, to provide platforms for dialogue, even when bilateral relations were strained.

We have worked tirelessly to strengthen international law as the foundation of the global multilateral order. However, today these achievements are being actively challenged. And there seems to be a growing readiness to backtrack from even what was previously achieved.

As my predecessor said one year ago in this very chamber: *pacta sunt servanda*. This cardinal principle of international relations and of international law fully applies to the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. A regime that is highly interconnected, with complementary and mutually reinforcing treaties, Nuclear Weapons Free Zones and bilateral agreements.

Let me first turn to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the cornerstone of the regime. Next year the treaty will mark its 50th anniversary. In the upcoming Review Conference, we will of course evaluate the implementation of the treaty. But this is only part of our

task. It is vital that we also agree on further concrete progress towards the NPT's ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was the last treaty negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament. That was 23 years ago! Today we are still waiting for its entry into force. Although the CTBTO and its International Monitoring System have again and again demonstrated their efficiency and importance. This is in my view not only a shame. It is a disgrace for the whole international community.

Nuclear disarmament has in practice ground to halt and - worse - is being partially even reversed. New nuclear weapons are being developed; more delivery systems are being deployed; trillion-dollar modernisation programmes aim at keeping nuclear weapons in service for decades to come, at the same time security conditions keep worsening.

Against this backdrop, the 2017 adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was a historic breakthrough. This treaty is indispensable for the fulfilment of NPT's ambition of a nuclear weapon free world. By adopting the treaty, 122 states unequivocally affirmed that a nuclear weapon-free world is a more secure world for all. There is no stronger commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation.

Rapid technological advances raise new questions and challenges. Are current systems sufficiently shielded against cyber-attacks? Can nuclear weapons be hacked? How do we deal with the weaponization of artificial intelligence? It is clear: Humans must remain in control of selecting and engaging targets. In this area we have the moral obligation to act before we are overtaken by facts on the ground. Therefore, Austria fully supports the immediate start of negotiations of a legally binding instrument to ensure human control over decisions of life and death.

Mr. President,

It is a basic principle of international humanitarian law to draw a clear distinction between combatants and civilians. At the same time, the increasing urbanization of conflict is a major challenge for the protection of civilians. When explosive weapons with wide area impact is used in populated areas, more than 90% of the victims are civilians. How can this be compatible with the principle of distinction required by international law? To address this issue, the government of Austria will host an international conference on the protection of civilians in urban warfare. I cordially invite you all to join us in Vienna on October 1st.

Mr. President,

There is no doubt: We are living in challenging times. But challenges always bring opportunities. Disarmament plays a decisive role in safeguarding international peace and security.

Nuclear disarmament and arms control never occurs in a vacuum. It takes courage and foresight to take the right action. In the current security climate, we have no time to lose. Let us rebuild trust and let us work together.

Since the early days of Austria's UN membership my country has been firmly committed to implementing, advancing and strengthening the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control regime.

We are therefore honoured to take the responsibility of chairing this distinguished forum next year We look forward to engaging with all of you on how to preserve our achievements and accomplish urgent progress together.