

Conference on Disarmament

Plenary Meeting, 28.1.2019

Austria

Statement delivered by Ambassador Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger

Mr. President,

Austria aligns itself with the EU Statement delivered last week. In our national capacity, let me add the following remarks.

Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control have returned to the centre stage of global politics. Unimaginable suffering caused by weapons of mass destruction has reared its ugly head in the 21st century, when many had assumed that the world had closed that dark chapter of its history. The long-ignored global dangers of nuclear weapons have also returned into sharp focus. We must take this as a call to action and press on to make progress on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Their effective implementation contributes to safeguarding international peace and security. Times of geopolitical tensions increase the urgency for efforts of the disarmament community.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is an important pillar of European security for the last three decades. Thanks to the INF Treaty, almost three thousand missiles with nuclear and conventional warheads have been removed and verifiably destroyed. Its preservation as a viable treaty is of crucial importance. We call for constructive dialogue between the two Treaty parties in order to address compliance concerns in a substantial and transparent way, to uphold the treaty and to safeguard its security benefits. Erosion of the INF will have serious consequences on the security of its States-Parties and Europe, but also on the whole world.

Currently a lot of focus is being put on the security climate with attempts to justify the attempted rollback of legal obligations and even the upgrading of arsenals. This stands in direct contrast to what we here in the CD have unwaveringly been working on – that is to uphold, strengthen and further enhance the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control architecture. Rather than increase tensions through military build-ups, the disarmament regime provides us with mechanisms to defuse them. It is exactly in difficult circumstances, that we must make use of the multilateral fora that provide an opportunity to engage in dialogue on also on sensitive issues and restore trust. Let us make use of effective multilateralism and find peaceful solutions to the many pressing security challenges we face.

History shows what can be achieved. In fact some of the most crucial disarmament agreements were adopted in times of increased tensions. It was in the wake of the Cuban Missile crisis, which brought the world to the edge of nuclear war, that the long protracted efforts to negotiate a partial test ban, accelerated. In August 1963, only nine months after the Cuban Missile Crisis the Partial Test Ban Treaty opened for signature. In the same year, on 27 November 1963 the General Assembly adopted resolution 1911 (XVIII) laying the foundation for the denuclearization of Latin America, which concluded in the creation of the first regional nuclear weapon free zone five years later.

In the past, the CD has achieved outstanding successes and effectively contributed to the multilateral arena. The treaties negotiated in the CD shaped the disarmament regime and enhanced international security on the long term. The CD negotiated landmark treaties, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

On the CTBT, we applaud the latest ratification of Thailand, an Annex II State. It is a clear sign of the continued importance of the treaty and a demonstration of disarmament being taken seriously. Outstanding Annex II states should no longer delay their own accessions, waiting for others to join before them. Rather it is high time, that they, too, lead by example and finally bring the CTBT into force.

Despite the more than two decade stalemate, my delegation continues to believe that the CD has the potential to fulfil its mandate assigned by the international community. The CD could again make a contribution to enhance global peace and stability. The Austrian Delegation fully supports your efforts, Mr. President to build consensus on a programme of work. We trust in your able leadership to bring the CD closer to breaking the impasse.

Mr. President,

Preventing the humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons with their disastrous short and long term effects for our planet is the core concern underlying our disarmament efforts. Therefore progress on nuclear disarmament remains the top priority of my delegation on the CD agenda. All the more as geopolitical tensions raise the risk of nuclear conflict. In the current state of affairs we consider it essential to reinforce the taboo against all weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Next year will conclude the important Review Cycle of the NPT, tasked to review the status of the implementation of the Treaty and commitments agreed by consensus throughout previous review cycles. My delegation will spare no effort to contribute to a positive outcome in order to strengthen the cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Disarmament and non-proliferation are two sides of the same coin. Efforts on non-proliferation and disarmament are mutually reinforcing. We remain convinced that unless credible progress is achieved on disarmament, the proliferation pressure will increase. We are faced today with signs of a dangerous backsliding on nuclear disarmament. Coupled with current geopolitical tensions, increasing investment in military capabilities and development of new weapon systems, trust and stability will continue to erode. If national security continues to be pursued primarily through expensive weapons modernization and means of delivery enhancement programs, the danger of an arms race spiral will be difficult to avert.

This kind of narrowly-focussed approach to security to the detriment of global security is dangerously short-sighted. The humanitarian impact of a nuclear detonation, regardless of its cause, is and must be part of the equation on the security dimension of nuclear weapons. The quest for alleged security benefits through nuclear weapons by some leads to increased

risks for all. We continue to welcome that significant reductions in numbers were achieved since the peak of the cold war. But that trend has unfortunately slowly ground to a halt with more than 14.000 nuclear weapons remaining in existence. Given the potentially existential threat posed by nuclear weapons, urgent action is crucial. Working towards a world free of nuclear weapons is a shared responsibility of all states. Therefore broader discussion on the consequences, risks, legality and morality of nuclear weapons needs to be continued and adequately reflected. Austria would also welcome deliberations on the perceived role of those weapons in security doctrines.

Mr. President,

In today's world tangible progress towards realizing our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons should be pursued with an even greater sense of urgency. As experience with other weapons of mass destruction has shown, in order to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons it is essential to unequivocally prohibit them. A clear majority of UN member states therefore adopted the historic TPNW in 2017. The treaty is an indispensable step towards the long sought total elimination of nuclear weapons. Further legal and practical measures are required to achieve and maintain a world free of nuclear weapons. Building on the NPT's clear disarmament obligations, the adoption of TPNW brings us closer to implementing Article VI and constitutes tangible progress on the implementation of the NPT and commitments undertaken by States Parties.

Mr. President,

At this particularly challenging juncture, the CD has once again the opportunity to make a positive contribution to improving the current international security climate. We encourage all CD members to seize this opportunity.

I thank you.