



# Permanent Mission of Austria

to the United  
Nations in Geneva

CD Plenary Meeting June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## **Austria Statement upon assumption of the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament**

Disarmament is a key component to advance international peace and security. Yet, global military expenditures rise. We might be at the brink of an arms race. It is time to be reminded of the importance that disarmament plays in not only limiting risks of escalation, but also in easing tensions and building trust. Disarmament is a traditional key pillar of Austria's foreign policy.

In the light of the very particular circumstances we are faced with today and the limited time available I draw some inspiration from the approach of my compatriot Ludwig Wittgenstein in his Tractatus and try to be as concise and short as possible. I will limit my statement to 10 observations concerning the state of affairs of the CD.

- 1.) Next to the ongoing climate crisis we are currently faced with a global health crisis that is already also turning into a socio-economic crisis in many countries - with potential implications for national and international security. It is my firm conviction that the CD is called upon to rise to the challenge and make a positive contribution.
- 2.) I suggest a careful and cautious restart focusing more on what unites us – and not on what disunites us. We have an obligation to add to effective multilateralism, a multilateralism that ultimately yields results.
- 3.) 2020 sees the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations and our Charter, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the NPT and 32 years since the First Special session devoted to disarmament. Rereading the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly I was struck by the ambitious and cooperative language used in this agreed text. I quote: “ All the peoples of the world have a vital interest in the success of disarmament negotiations. Consequently, all States have the duty to contribute to efforts in the field of disarmament”. And “... the accumulation of weapons particularly nuclear weapons, today constitutes much more a threat than a protection for the future of mankind. The time has therefore come to put an end to this situation, to abandon the use of force in international relations and to seek security in disarmament, that is to say, through a gradual but effective process beginning with a reduction in the present level of armaments. The ending of the arms race and the achievement of real disarmament are tasks of primary importance and urgency” – these words are still valid today.
- 4.) The importance of listening to each other and the attempt to try harder to identify possible agreements towards and ultimately on a Program of Work and an eventual start of negotiations.

We have to try to look beyond rhetoric posturing and see where there are opportunities to get out of the current cul-de-sac of the Conference on Disarmament.

- 5.) Being fully aware that the Conference on Disarmament was designed to be a negotiating body I would hereby like to appeal to rethink the consensus principle and remember what it was initially intended to be, namely a matter of last resort to put a halt when ultimate security interests are affected, rather than an automatic trump card to block by means of procedure any potential proposal to advance the cause of multilateral disarmament.
- 6.) We should also draw inspiration from one of the last major concrete achievements of the Conference on Disarmament. The CTBTO, founded in 1996, is born from the ambition to end nuclear testing for good. It has established a unique and comprehensive verification regime with a global International Monitoring System at its heart. Entry into force would be the next important step.
- 7.) The 112 days break forced upon us as result of the global COVID-19 Pandemic could be used as a reflection phase - or even a wake up call - in order to try a new approach.
- 8.) History shows us that sufficient levels of trust and confidence should not stand in the way of negotiations. Sometimes we have to start negotiations on a thin level of trust and allow trust and confidence to grow as byproducts of multilateral negotiations while focusing on substance.
- 9.) The importance of additional confidence and trust building measures. Vienna hosted US-Russian talks on disarmament, arms control and the future of New START. It is positive that the discussions will continue. We hope for progress in these important deliberations, with positive security implications for the international community.
- 10.) The importance of cross-regional co-operation. The P6 cooperation has been excellent. Austria as part of the P6 endeavor has tried to do everything to structure our work on the basis of a Program of Work. We came very close. The vast majority of countries have shown flexibility and pragmatism. Pragmatism, flexibility, political will and a commitment to advance on the path of disarmament is what the world expects from us. It is up to us to deliver.