Statement by H.E. Mr. Robert Müller
Ambassador and PR of the Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN
before the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva, 18 September 2020

Mr. President,

2020 has been a year full of unexpected challenges. Multilateralism and respect for a rules-based international order remains in crisis. It was all the more encouraging to see that when there was the opportunity, CD members were ready to restart meetings. They demonstrated respect for the body and its important agenda. Given the difficult overall circumstances of the pandemic, but also within our particular dossier, it was heartening to see assurances of flexibility be put into action as we organized the first plenary after the pause. This would not have been possible if not each and every state represented here had taken the decision to let pragmatism prevail. I would like to thank delegations for their efforts, flexibility and commitment. It leaves me with the positive conclusion, when there is a will there is a way.

Much of this sentiment relates to readiness for dialogue and cooperation even in difficult circumstances. Dialogue and cooperation has also been the leading principle of our efforts among the P6. I would like to thank fellow P6 countries Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh and Belarus for an extraordinary multilateral teamwork. This group from different regions and sometimes different areas of focus within the disarmament agenda worked together in the spirit of serving the Conference. Austria welcomes that 2021 P6 decided to follow this practice and are already in contact. Their statement we just heard by Belgium on behalf of the P6 for 2021, is testimony to their willingness to bring the CD forward. I already flag our support for their endeavor. Cooperation among the presidents will of course not solve all pending issues in this chamber, but it certainly can contribute to overcome them.
As the 2020 session comes to a close, I feel encouraged that most delegations in this room share this spirit of constructiveness and focus on substance, rather than bilateral issues beyond the mandate of the CD. Unfortunately, not all delegations follow this path.

Disarmament concerns the security of all States. All countries have a stake. We continue to think that all UN member states should be able to participate in the multilateral fora that are relevant to their interest. Dialogue is the basis of diplomacy. We see consensus as a means to protect vital ultimate security interest, not for preventing dialogue and preliminary exchanges. We hope that in the future the principle of openness of the CD will prevail, for the CD not to isolate itself in the multilateral disarmament for a more personal note I wish to conclude by encouraging all members of the CD, to dare to think outside the box. Challenges come with opportunities. In the midst of a pandemic I believe we have the opportunity to think how the CD could be more effective in addressing its agenda. Our guiding idea should be to finally get back to fulfilling this bodies mandate.