First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons  
21 June 2022

Statement by AUSTRIA

delivered by H.E. Alexander Schallenberg
Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Dear colleagues,

In 2014, at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, we together issued the Austrian Pledge – later known as the "Humanitarian Pledge".

In this pledge, we collectively committed to – and I quote – “fill the legal gap and prohibit nuclear weapons due to their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and risks”.

Today, eight years later, I have the immense pleasure to welcome you back in Vienna for the First Meeting of States Parties of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

We have really gone a long way and can be proud of what we achieved. This is a historic treaty, we have fulfilled our pledge.

However, this is no time to celebrate. War has returned to Europe. And the shockwaves of this war of aggression can be felt around the globe.

But not only that, Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine has been accompanied by explicit threats of the use of nuclear weapons.

This is blatant nuclear blackmail!  
It is a clear violation of the UN Charter, completely irresponsible and utterly unacceptable!

These developments are a severe shock for the entire nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. What is more, they have put one truth sharply into focus: as long as these horrendous weapons exist, they are a threat to us all.

Nuclear risks have not been this high for decades. And it is our responsibility to draw the right lessons.
Some see recent developments as a validation of nuclear deterrence. I am convinced that such a conclusion is not only wrong, but also extremely dangerous.

Because, in its final consequence, it is no less than a call for further proliferation.

The logic that nuclear weapons provide security is a fundamental error. Because deterrence requires credibility. Meaning the readiness to actually use these weapons. This is nothing less than a massive nuclear Damocles sword hanging over the heads of all of us, of all of humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must take – and we have taken - a different path.

One not based on the threat of mass destruction and unimaginable human suffering.

One that is not a perpetual bet against the common security of us all.

For this, we need a paradigm shift in the way the international community looks at nuclear weapons.

First: We cannot continue to assume that these weapons will never be used again. Our policies should not be based on wishful thinking. We need a more realistic approach, based on evidence. And we have the evidence on our side.

Second: We must counter the narrative that any possession of nuclear weapons is legitimate. They are unacceptable because of the humanitarian risks and consequences.

As former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan put it once: “There are no right hands that can handle the wrong weapons”.

The TPNW represents exactly this new paradigm.

And yet we all know that we are facing an uphill battle.

But I am convinced of the Treaty’s tremendous transformational power.

Together and with the help of civil society, and I am very proud of this successful public-private partnership, we will be able to make progress. Slowly, maybe, but persistently.

And I am optimistic because we have the evidence on our side. And because there is simply no alternative if we want to remove this existential threat to humanity.
So let us set the course to implement the milestones of this treaty. By adopting the important decisions on the table.

Some technical, and some of immediate humanitarian importance, such as the work on victim assistance and environmental remediation.

Let me extend this appeal to all our partners attending as observers today. I very much welcome your presence. We hope that you will take this step and sign and ratify the TPNW.

We are here to send a strong signal that multilateral cooperation is the only way to deal with issues of global concern. That all States have an equally valid stake when it comes to our common security.

Dear colleagues,

We are living through a crucial moment in history.

One that requires a great sense of responsibility.

You have all come to Vienna to heed this call.

I am convinced that with this common spirit, and with this positive energy, our conference will be another milestone on our way towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

I wish you and all of us a successful conference.