

# Conference on Disarmament

28 August 2015

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## **Note verbale dated 25 August 2015 from the Permanent Mission of Austria addressed to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament transmitting the joint statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons delivered by the Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria during the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons on 28 April 2015**

The Permanent Mission of Austria presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and has honour to transmit herewith the "Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons", which was delivered by the Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz during the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on 28 April 2015 on behalf of 159 countries. Austria kindly requests this document to be issued as an official document of the 2015 Session of the Conference of Disarmament.

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## **2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**

### **Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons**

**Delivered by H.E. Sebastian Kurz, Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria, on 28 April 2015**

1. I am taking the floor on behalf of Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Holy See, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Norway, Oman, Palau, State of Palestine, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and my own country, Austria.<sup>1</sup>

2. Our countries are deeply concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. Past experience from the use and testing of nuclear weapons has amply demonstrated the unacceptable humanitarian consequences caused by the immense, uncontrollable destructive capability and indiscriminate nature of these weapons. The fact-based discussion that took place at the Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, convened respectively by Norway in March 2013, Mexico in February 2014 and Austria in December 2014, has allowed us to deepen our collective understanding of those consequences. A key message from experts and international organisations was that no State or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation or provide adequate assistance to victims.

3. The broad participation at those Conferences, with attendance most recently in Vienna by 158 States, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a number of

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<sup>1</sup> Statement open to support by further countries.

humanitarian organizations of the United Nations and civil society, reflected the recognition that the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are a fundamental and global concern. We firmly believe that it is in the interests of all States to engage in discussions on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, which aim to further broaden and deepen understanding of this matter, and we welcome civil society's ongoing engagement.

4. This work is essential, because the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons affect not only governments, but each and every citizen of our interconnected world. They have deep implications for human survival; for our environment; for socio-economic development; for our economies; and for the health of future generations. For these reasons, we firmly believe that awareness of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches and efforts towards nuclear disarmament, including in the work of the 2015 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

5. This is not, of course, a new idea. The appalling humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons became evident from the moment of their first use, and from that moment have motivated humanity's aspirations for a world free from this threat, which have also inspired this statement. The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have been reflected in numerous resolutions of the United Nations, including the first resolution passed by the General Assembly in 1946, and in multilateral instruments including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The world's most eminent nuclear physicists observed as early as 1955 that nuclear weapons threaten the continued existence of mankind and that a war with these weapons could quite possibly put an end to the human race. The First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-1) stressed in 1978 that "nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilisation." These expressions of profound concern remain as compelling as ever. In spite of this, the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have not been at the core of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation deliberations for many years.

6. We are therefore encouraged that the humanitarian focus is now well established on the global agenda. The 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons expressed "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons". That deep concern informed the 26 November 2011 resolution of the Council of Delegates of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the decision in 2012 of the General Assembly to establish an open-ended working group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. It underlies the Special Declaration of the Third Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States in January 2015 on the urgent need for a nuclear weapons free world. In September 2013, at the High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament, numerous leaders from around the world again evoked that deep concern as they called for progress to be made on nuclear disarmament. More than three quarters of all countries supported the Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons delivered at the 2014 First Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Today's statement again demonstrates the growing political support for the humanitarian focus.

7. It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances. The catastrophic effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, cannot be adequately addressed. All efforts must be exerted to eliminate the threat of these weapons of mass destruction.

8. The only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is through their total elimination. All States share the responsibility to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, to prevent their vertical and horizontal proliferation and to achieve nuclear

disarmament, including through fulfilling the objectives of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and achieving its universality.

9. We welcome the renewed resolve of the international community, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and international humanitarian organisations, to address the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. By raising awareness about this issue, civil society has a crucial role to play side-by-side with governments as we fulfil our responsibilities. We owe it to future generations to work together to do just that, and in doing so to rid our world of the threat posed by nuclear weapons.

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