Mr President,

As this is the first time I am taking the floor during your presidency, let me congratulate you upon the assumption of this important duty. I wish to express the full support by my delegation. Austria aligns herself with the Statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. As this is an issue of high importance to my delegation, let me address some aspects of particular concern in our national capacity.

**Disarmament is indeed in the DNA of the United Nations.** We welcome the call by the Secretary General to reinvigorate multilateral disarmament institutions and his call for an intensified effort to include disarmament more strenuously in our multilateral toolboxes to address tensions, prevent armed conflict and protect civilians.

In times of heightened tensions, stepping up disarmament efforts becomes all the more important. We therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss the timely and highly pertinent Disarmament Agenda of the Secretary General in the CD. We welcome that the Secretary General undertook the effort to outline his ideas and avenues of action in such a comprehensive document. His personal commitment underlines the necessity for global disarmament for the benefit of global stability, as well as national and collective security. We also welcome the action oriented approach of the Agenda and hope that the CD could contribute to the implementation of the actions relevant to its own agenda.

Since the iron curtain fell, the world has become increasingly multipolar and globalized. Long-standing global norms and institutions are increasingly being challenged. To address these developments effective multilateralism is decisive for 21st century global stability and security. As eloquently reiterated by the Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl in June in this chamber: My country is fully committed to effective multilateralism with the United Nations at its core. In my delegation’s view, efforts to enhance mutual trust and confidence, as well as respecting the rules of a rules based order strengthen collective security.

As the global environment evolves, our multilateral system needs to keep pace. We need to carefully consider whether some instruments and norms need further clarification, such as recently agreed upon in the case of enforcing the chemical weapons prohibition. If we choose to nationally reinterpret the existing international norms, we might risk undermining them by
giving rise to a diversity of views on implementation. The eroding respect for international norms is closely linked to the implementation of longstanding commitments. Any fulfillment of previously agreed commitments is also a welcomed confidence building measure. In my delegation’s view, to uphold the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime we should engage jointly in making it ready for the 21st century challenges and needs.

Today, in a globalized world the human being is increasingly placed at the center of security considerations. Since the notion of security is not limited to the state but also the constituencies forming the state, namely its population, national security and human security must never be seen in isolation from each other, but have to be pursued together as two sides of the same coin. Disarmament treaties such as the Chemical Weapons Convention or the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention bear testimony to that.

Mr. President,

With regard to the Secretary General’s Agenda I would like to echo three main areas of focus in which my delegation will continue its substantive engagement:

In the part dedicated to “Disarmament to save humanity” a strong, urgent call for progress on nuclear disarmament is made. My country firmly supports the long-standing efforts of the international community to totally eliminate nuclear weapons, as this is the only guarantee that these weapons are never to be used again, be it deliberately, accidentally or by miscalculation.

73 years ago people in Hiroshima tried to cope with the devastating humanitarian consequences caused by the first use of an atomic bomb on August 6. Due to extensive development and horizontal and vertical modernization efforts over decades, it can be assumed that today’s warheads are by far more destructive than those we witnessed in Hiroshima. According to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Organisation, the most powerful nuclear weapon ever tested the Soviet ‘Tsar Bomba’ had a yield of 50 megatons, or the power of around 3,800 Hiroshima bombs detonated simultaneously.

Nuclear weapons are indiscriminate, inhumane and the most destructive weapon of mass destruction. The catastrophic humanitarian effects cannot be contained by any borders and would thus affect all states. The current arsenals are more than sufficient to extinguish humanity several times over. The mere existence of nuclear weapons is a daily Damocles’ sword over humanity. Given the unacceptable catastrophic humanitarian harm the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons is a humanitarian imperative.
Due to the unacceptable risks involved, nuclear disarmament “remains the highest disarmament priority of the United Nations.” We are encouraged by the call of the UN SG to make progress on nuclear disarmament to safe humanity. We welcome his call on member states to revitalize their pursuit of the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and his announcement to redouble his efforts to re-energize nuclear disarmament discussions. Apart from resuming dialogue we should seek to “extend the norms against nuclear weapons and their proliferation, and prepare the world free of nuclear weapons.”

As repeated on numerous occasions by my delegation non-proliferation and disarmament efforts are intrinsically linked. We are proud to be among the leading countries engaging on bringing about the legally binding prohibition of nuclear weapons and proudly deposited our instrument of ratification of the TPNW. The TPNW is a key piece in the global disarmament and non-proliferation puzzle the international community is building. As the United Nations Secretary General reaffirmed the TPNW is fully compatible with the existing international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Specifically, the TPNW strengthens the NPT and is indispensable for the full implementation of Article VI of the NPT. The practical steps and the NPT 2010 Action plan clearly lay out the actions that would bring us closer to the fulfillment of obligations under the cornerstone of our regime, the NPT, including the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons. Implementing previous commitments is not only necessary to not further undermine the current regime, but it is also an important trust and confidence building measure contributing to the easing of tensions.

Further measures will need to be urgently taken to complement the regime, among them the prompt entry into force of the CTBT (Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty) as called for in the UN SG’s disarmament agenda, the beginning of the long-overdue negotiations on fissile material, or the development of options and capacities for nuclear disarmament verification for both - reduction and elimination.

Pending the total elimination of these weapons, immediate risk reduction measures are urgent. Risk reduction benefits both, the disarmament objective and the non-proliferation objectives, and they serve as confidence building measures to decrease tensions. Taking immediate action on risk reduction measures would positively impact dialogue and cooperation.

Let me now turn to “disarmament that saves lives”. With weaponry spending at a post-cold war height and new technologies arising, we welcome the call by the UN SG to step up the efforts to protect civilians, in particular from the effects of urbanization of armed conflict.

The number of victims of the devastating impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas keeps increasing. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 92% of the victims are civilians. Given the general principles of proportionality and distinction, this is unacceptable. The direct, medium and long-term consequences of these weapons, as well as
the reverberating effects of the use of EWIPA require urgently increased attention. We welcome the encouragement received from the SG by announcing his action to “support the efforts of Member States to develop a political declaration, as well as appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies in conformity with international humanitarian law relating to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.” In line with the SG’s agenda my delegation will continue its work on the political declaration with an aim to better protect civilians in armed conflict. Obviously, increased and enhanced data collection, as also called for in the agenda, will be very helpful in this regard.

As we reaffirm our commitment to international law including IHL principles, there are areas where clarification and new legal norms are needed. This takes me to the last part of the UN SG’s agenda “disarmament for future generations”. Technological progress is advancing at unprecedented speed. The weaponization of artificial intelligence, particular in technological applications involving high degrees of automatization and autonomy is of utmost concern to my delegation. Keeping humans in control of lethal autonomous weapons is critical in upholding international law, ethical and moral global standards as well as to preventing extremely negative effects to regional and global security including a new arms race. We welcome the commitment by the SG to support efforts of UN MS “to elaborate new measures, including through political or legally binding arrangements, to ensure that humans remain at all times in control over the use of force”.

Let me conclude by thanking you, Mr. President, once again for your initiative to discuss the Secretary General’s Agenda in the CD. Many of its pressing issues are dealt with in this chamber. The toolbox of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control is manifold.

We understand the UN SG agenda as an urgent call for action in multilateral disarmament efforts. And we welcome the new impetus this will hopefully give to our deliberations here in this chamber. After 22 years of stalemate this is truly needed. We share the view that renewed dedication and dialogue is required. We wish to echo the need expressed in the Agenda to improve coordination and synergies among the principal disarmament organs. Simultaneously, it is important to remain focused in order to be effective and efficient. Duplication of work might not only lead to decreased resource efficiency, but also to increasing the complexity by adding possible competing avenues of discussions. My delegation stands ready to enhance sincere, substantive and result-orientated dialogue on how the CD could contribute to the actions contained in the document.

I thank you.