

61st General Conference of the IAEA; General Debate;
Statement by Austria
Delivered by Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Linhart
Vienna, September 18, 2017

Madame President,
Mr. Director General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, I would like to join the others and extend a very warm welcome to all the participants of this year's General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Austria is honoured and privileged to host the Agency. Allow me also, Madame President, to congratulate you on your election and to assure you of the full support of my delegation.

It gives me particular pleasure to congratulate the Director General for his reappointment for another term at the helm of the Agency. We are looking forward to continuing our close and excellent co-operation with him and the Secretariat.

Madame President,

Austria regards the Technical Co-operation Programme of the IAEA as an integral part of its activities. While we retain reservations about nuclear energy generation, we fully support the Agency's activities in the wider area of non-power applications of peaceful nuclear science and technology. For this reason I would like to announce that Austria will continue its contribution to the Technical Cooperation Fund in 2018.

Madame President,

Austria aligns herself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. From a national perspective, I would like to add some remarks:

Last Thursday, the DPRK fired again a ballistic missile over Japan into the Pacific. Only two weeks ago, the world had to witness the sixth and so far strongest nuclear test by the DPRK. The Austrian Foreign Minister condemned these actions in the strongest terms. The Austrian Foreign Ministry summoned the North Korean representative in

Vienna. We have consistently condemned all dangerous and provocative actions of Pyongyang. We have also faithfully implemented all countermeasures taken by the international community. The behaviour of the DPRK poses a direct challenge to the prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapons – this is the core objective of the IAEA and its member States. The most recent UNSC resolution 2375 is important as it demonstrates the determination and unity of the international community to react decisively to the DPRK nuclear weapons program.

Austria is convinced that this issue can only be solved with a negotiated agreement. The "JCPOA" - Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - regarding the Iranian Nuclear Program could serve as a role model. It demonstrates that we can overcome the most difficult dead end situation with serious dialogue and negotiations. Austria attaches utmost importance to the ongoing implementation of the JCPOA and particularly to the crucial role of IAEA in verifying and monitoring the process.

The precarious situation on the Korean peninsula also shows that our current non-proliferation efforts centered on the NPT – the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons - and the IAEA safeguards system must be further strengthened. But the situation must also be a wake-up call for all of us. It is evident that a mere continuation of existing approaches cannot be successful. In particular, and in order to become more effective, non-proliferation must be paired with much greater efforts in nuclear disarmament. The two – non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament – must clearly go hand in hand.

These days, the new TPNW - Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - , will be opened for signature in New York. I am aware of the vivid and sometimes emotional debates within this Agency about TPNW. Therefore I would like to seize this opportunity to offer a clarification on one key aspect of particular interest for this audience: the impact of the TPNW on non-proliferation. Article 3 of the new treaty ensures that States maintain their current IAEA safeguards obligations as a minimum. For the majority of States, obligations are Additional Protocols resulting in higher standards of non-proliferation verification than those set out by the NPT. For all other States Parties, the TPNW sets the NPT's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement as minimum requirement while keeping the door open for stronger commitments in the future. So what the TPNW effectively does is to bolster IAEA's safeguards system.

Madame President,

As to Austria's contributions to IAEA's various programmatic and infrastructure activities, let me mention our continued support for the ongoing modernisation of the Agency's nuclear applications laboratories in Seibersdorf. Austria is very satisfied by the constant progress of this work and I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all members of the Group of Friends for their invaluable cooperation to secure the necessary funds and to all others who have contributed to the project.

Madame President,

One last word on nuclear power:

For Austria it is important that in the cost and impact assessment of nuclear power plants all negative externalities like possible accidents, impact scenarios on public health and the environment - such as radioactive waste disposal - are being fully taken into account. If we include all these factors in our calculation, we are deeply convinced that nuclear energy can never be competitive nor safe.

This is why Austria advocates a worldwide controlled phasing out of nuclear energy production. For achieving this, we need stronger efforts to make full use of renewable energies. There is also ample room to enhance global energy efficiency and energy savings. While respecting the sovereign rights of States to opt for nuclear power, Austria is promoting transparent and open dialogue with neighbouring countries over the whole nuclear cycle.

A thorough and serious implementation of the Vienna Declaration on Nuclear Safety would imply that safety improvements are carried out at all 440 existing nuclear power plants. For new Nuclear Power Plants these high standards have to be applied anyway. Austria expects that the IAEA fully supports Member States to reach that agreed objective soon.

Nuclear safety must be a top priority. When defining its nuclear safety strategy and program of work it is therefore vital that IAEA takes into account existing expertise such as the Fukushima Report of the DG or the Vienna Declaration on Nuclear Safety.

Madame President,

In closing, I would like to reiterate how much Austria appreciates the work done by the Director General and his staff since we last met celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Agency's foundation a year ago. Let me assure you that Austria will, as in the past, lend its full support to the Agency.