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Austria Announces UN General Assembly Resolution to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons in 2017

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Austria's foreign minister, Sebastian Kurz, announced on Wednesday that his country would join other UN member states in tabling a resolution next month to convene negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons in 2017.

Speaking in the high-level debate of the UN General Assembly in New York, he said that "experience shows that the first step to eliminate weapons of mass destruction is to prohibit them through legally binding norms".

The announcement follows a landmark recommendation last month by a UN working group in Geneva for the General Assembly to convene a conference in 2017 to negotiate "a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination".

The Austrian-sponsored resolution would take forward this recommendation by establishing a formal mandate for negotiations. The deadline for tabling the resolution in the General Assembly's First Committee, which deals with disarmament matters, is 13 October.

Following the tabling, nations will debate the resolution, then vote on whether to adopt it in the final week of October or first week of November. A second, confirmatory vote will take place in a plenary session of the General Assembly early in December.

ICAN warmly welcomes Austria's announcement. "This is a major breakthrough in global efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons. The resolution will be of enormous historical importance," said Beatrice Fihn, executive director of ICAN.

"The proposed treaty will place nuclear weapons on the same legal footing as other weapons of mass destruction, which have long been prohibited under international law. It will be a major step towards the goal of elimination," she said.

In 2014 Austria hosted an intergovernmental conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, at which it launched a diplomatic pledge, supported by 127 nations, "to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons".

Excerpt from Austria's statement:

"In a world that is less and less secure and faced with more and more tensions between big powers, nuclear disarmament remains the number one unfinished business. The recent nuclear tests by DPRK [North Korea] should be a warning signal. We all agree that the humanitarian consequences of the explosion of nuclear weapons would be unacceptable, and therefore we have to finally get rid of all these nuclear weapons.

Experience shows that the first step to eliminate weapons of mass destruction is to prohibit them through legally binding norms.

Together with other member states, Austria will table a draft resolution to convene negotiations on a legally binding

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comprehensive instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons in 2017."

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