



Questions and Answers about the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, compiled by the Austrian Foreign Ministry

### **Why is Austria organizing the Conference?**

The Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons is being organized by Austria out of its deep concern that the dangers and risks from nuclear weapons show little sign of diminishing.

Nuclear disarmament is languishing and nuclear weapons modernization programs are gaining traction, challenging the treaty-based collective security system in effect since 1968.

The consequences of the use of nuclear weapons would be devastating and unmanageable. It is the purpose of the Vienna Conference, therefore, to bring the humanitarian consequences of such an event to the attention of the public and policy makers to bolster the cause for nuclear disarmament.

The goal of the Vienna Conference is simple: it is to prevent harm. The Conference seeks to provide impetus to collective efforts that move international relations beyond a security system based on "mutually assured destruction," one that is fraught with risk.

### **What will the Conference consider?**

The Vienna Conference will explore the potential humanitarian consequences of the detonation of nuclear weapons, such as the impact on health, the environment, development, climate, food security, and global infrastructure. There will also be focus on the impact of the more than 2000 nuclear tests conducted since 1945.

The Conference will also address the human and technical factors that could lead to the use of nuclear weapons, including human error, negligence, miscalculation, miscommunication, technical faults, risk calculation, vulnerability and cyber security lapses. Moreover, it will review the norms under existing international law related to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons explosions. The proceedings will be conducted in an informal setting and audience participation is encouraged. Expert panels will be followed by a question and answer period.

### **Who will participate?**

Representation by all states is welcome and they have all been invited. The Conference will also be open to relevant international organizations, academics and civil society. Its organizers are encouraging open, substantive and constructive discussion. About 150 states are expected to be represented with about 800 participants, including large numbers of social activists. Religious leaders and parliamentarians have also been invited to participate. The opening session will be chaired by Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz. Other opening speakers, to be confirmed, include the UN Secretary General or the UN High Representative for Disarmament, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and a Hibakusha (a survivor of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear attacks) representative.

### **What are the goals of the Conference?**

Austria seeks to strengthen the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime and generate momentum for concrete progress on nuclear disarmament. The better the international community comprehends the scale of these consequences and of the risks involved, the clearer the case and the greater the urgency for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Conference will build upon two previous international conferences devoted to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons – in Norway in March 2013 and in Mexico in March 2014.

### **Will the five official nuclear weapons states participate?**

Austria believes that states in possession of nuclear weapons should heed the concerns of the international community and participate in this critical debate. Austria has prepared for the conference in a transparent manner and has reached out to all weapons states. It is hoped that nuclear weapons holders will engage constructively in the Vienna Conference and in the humanitarian impact dialogue. They have not been represented in the two previous conferences.

### **What outcome is expected?**

Austria does not foresee a negotiated outcome to the conference and will seek to reflect the discussions and proceedings in a factual summary, under the responsibility of the chair of the Conference. The collective findings of the Conference on the humanitarian consequences, the risks associated with nuclear weapons, as well as the legal aspects discussed in Vienna, will provide - together with a strong momentum and sense of urgency - key input in particular to the 2015 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference.

### **Why do these issues need to be addressed now?**

Reason demands urgent action to end the age of nuclear weapons, which Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has aptly called a "historical nightmare". The growing momentum and focus on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons is contributing to international dialogue about nuclear disarmament. Averting the risks of nuclear weapons would be of universal benefit. Recent geopolitical developments have only underscored the urgency of nuclear disarmament.

Austria looks forward to the active participation of all stakeholders in the Vienna Conference who want progress in nuclear disarmament and a world free of nuclear weapons. As Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz stated on the occasion of the International Day for the total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons on 26 September 2014 "(...) We need to act collectively to educate and to save future generations from the risk of nuclear devastation, and to promote peace and a sustainable future".