

CTBT Conference Science and Technology 2011 (S&T 2011)

Hofburg, 8 June 2011

Statement by H.E. Dr. Michael Spindelegger

Vice Chancellor of the Republic of Austria

Executive Secretary Tibor Toth,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates, scientists and friends of the CTBT

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to the CTBT: Science and Technology 2011 Conference here at the Hofburg Palace. For many of you it will be a return to Vienna after the 2009 Conference “International Scientific Studies”, which I had the pleasure to attend and which Austria was also pleased to support. Other participants will be here for the first time, even engaging for the first time with the CTBTO. To all of you I would like to extend a very warm welcome.

Austria is a proud host to the United Nations and several important International Organizations. Many of the most pertinent issues of our time are addressed by the international community here in Vienna, be it security, energy, development, organized crime, drugs to name a few. However, it is certainly the nuclear dossier that has continuously gained in prominence among the “Vienna Issues” over the past years.

We are at a critical juncture with respect to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We are faced with very serious concerns about nuclear proliferation and the risks of nuclear terrorism. At the same time, there is new political momentum towards a world free of nuclear weapons and to foster true multilateral cooperation in our collective disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. Moreover, the terrible tragedy in Fukushima has brought into clear focus the grave risks that are inherent in the use of nuclear energy. In short, nuclear safety and security are today among the key policy areas that demand a cooperative approach and coherent answers from the international community.

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is right at the centre of such an approach. It prohibits nuclear tests. It is a key instrument against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It is a long sought-after nuclear disarmament measure. It builds confidence among member states. It epitomizes multilateral cooperation by placing the same obligations on member states and granting equal rights to all. It is one of the legal elements that must be in place to allow nuclear activities to be conducted in as safe and as secure an environment as possible. We are proud that this important organization is headquartered in Vienna. Austria will continue to work tirelessly with our partners to convince the remaining states whose ratification is required until the CTBT is finally brought into legal effect. Its entry into force is long overdue and necessary.

This conference, however, is not a political gathering. It is a scientific conference and as such an opportunity for the CTBTO to further strengthen its ties with the scientific community. This is not a fancy. It is a must for the CTBT and its credibility. The nexus between politics and science is particularly pronounced in the case of the CTBT. The legal aspect is but one of its pillars. Its strength and relevance also derives from the credibility of the verification regime that underpins the CTBT and its norms.

Much has been achieved in building up the verification regime since the CTBTO was set up in Vienna. By now, the build-up is almost complete and the verification regime is already fully operational. This is made clear by the daily provision of high quality and continuously improving monitoring data. It was also clearly evidenced by the performance of the CTBTO during the two North Korean nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009. Austria was a non-permanent member of the Security Council when North Korea exploded its second nuclear device. The timely and reliable information that we received from the CTBTO was of great value to us and facilitated the decision making process in the Security Council. In our view, the case has been made clearly that CTBT verification works.

However, the credibility of CTBT verification capabilities must be safeguarded for the future. This requires a permanent and fruitful exchange with the scientific community to allow the CTBTO to remain at the forefront of those sciences and technologies of relevance for verification. In this exchange – and let me applaud Executive Secretary Toth for his determination in this respect -

we have seen some very important developments in recent years. It has become increasingly clear that the verification capabilities, in particular the global system of monitoring stations, provide additional benefits to the international community that were not anticipated. I would like to highlight in particular the contribution to tsunami warning that is now well established. The Fukushima accident gave another glimpse of the enormous potential that this system provides much beyond the originally intended use of nuclear test monitoring. I understand that we have only scratched the surface in understanding the benefits and practical application that the CTBT system could bring for a wide range of areas and issues. Many new ideas will be presented here or will be further developed as a result of this and future meetings.

In times of global financial crisis, it is imperative that scarce resources are used in the best possible way and that synergies are identified wherever possible. This is the way within our societies and it is also what we should strive for in our multilateral cooperation. I am therefore fully convinced that the CTBT assets built over the past 15 years should be used wherever they can bring added value to our common endeavours. Austria will certainly support such a trend and all such efforts.

In closing, I would like to wish you a very fruitful and interesting meeting. I look forward to hearing what new ideas emerge from this conference both those that strengthen the CTBT, strengthen the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime and indeed those that develop the synergies between the CTBTO and the scientific community.

Thank you