

Statement by Austria

As delivered by H.E. Nikolaus Marschik
Secretary General for Foreign Affairs
at the International Conference on Nuclear Security (ICONS)
Vienna, 21 May 2024

Co-Presidents,
Director-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen!

As host country to the IAEA, it is a pleasure to welcome all of you on this second conference day in Vienna!

First, let me congratulate the co-presidents on your election. And thank you for your excellent steering of the preparatory work leading to this important conference.

Dear Colleagues,

We meet at a time when war is still raging in Europe. More than 2 years ago, Russia brutally invaded its neighbour Ukraine. Since then, Russia has continued with violence, destruction and threats, including threats with nuclear weapons, violating the UN charter.

For all those, who believe in a rules-based international order, these actions are simply unacceptable. And the humanitarian and environmental consequences of any use of nuclear weapons would be catastrophic.

Therefore, I sincerely thank Director-General Rafael Grossi and his team for all your active engagement und initiatives to improve nuclear safety and security at nuclear power plants in Ukraine. We are all aware of the

risks your team is facing in order to provide us Member States with information.

And we highly value your “7 indispensable pillars” for nuclear safety and security for all nuclear power plants as well as the 5 principles for the Ukrainian Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

Civil nuclear installations are not designed to withstand armed conflict and should neither be targeted nor used for stationing war material. Serious risks identified by the Agency were created by Russia’s illegal seizure of the plant two years ago. Therefore, returning the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant to the full control of the Ukrainian authorities would significantly decrease the risk of a nuclear accident.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are well aware, Austria does not produce nuclear power at all. Nuclear power generates highly radioactive nuclear waste, thereby making it - in our assessment - a major safety and security burden for future generations.

The Agency has done excellent work in supporting Member States in continuously improving nuclear safety and security. We are fully convinced that the Agency must be at the centre of promoting, sustaining and strengthening the global nuclear security architecture.

And we all have the responsibility to support the Agency in building a robust nuclear security culture. One concrete step in this direction is by joining the “*Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material*” and its Amendment.

The amendment was put forward by like-minded States 20 years ago, in 2004. In our view, the amendment significantly strengthens the Convention in terms of scope, as well as regarding offences related to trafficking and sabotage.

It also strengthens international cooperation: This is of crucial importance, especially regarding emerging nuclear security risks and threats, such as artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems that can independently choose and attack targets without human control.

Dear Colleagues,

At a time when multilateralism is under pressure by geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts, by lack of trust and non-cooperation, let us make the most of this conference to strengthen the nuclear security architecture, to build on our many shared ambitions and goals and to work together in the Vienna spirit.

I thank you very much and wish us all a very successful conference!