



**Republic of Austria**

**Statement by**

**Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch**

**On the**

**Austrian Moratorium**

**Concerning the Use of**

**Cluster Bombs and**

**Cluster Munitions**

**Oslo, February 22, 2007**

Minister Store! Your excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Let me start by warmly thanking the Norwegian Government for organizing this meeting and hosting it in this beautiful city of Oslo. Oslo was and continues to be an important meeting point for the international community, particularly when it comes to issues of international security and disarmament – and this city also hosts the award ceremony for the Nobel Peace Prize. Shortly before his death in 1896 the Austrian Peace activist and ardent advocate of disarmament, Bertha von Suttner, convinced Alfred Nobel to create what later became known as the Nobel Peace Prize to be awarded to the person that has *“done the most or the best work for fraternity between the nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies”* Bertha von Suttner later became the first female Nobel laureate for her substantial contribution to disarmament, particularly concerning the most horrendous weapons. Her candid appeal *“Lay down your arms!”* appears to be as timely and pressing today as it was at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her aspiration and the aim of the Nobel Peace Prize as such should help us to guide our work here at this conference.

Co-Chairs,

Humanitarian concerns traditionally rank high in the Austrian foreign policy agenda. Austria has hence expressed on numerous occasions our serious concerns about the humanitarian consequences associated with cluster bombs and munitions. We continue to hold the view that existing general rules of International Humanitarian Law have not been adequately applied in many instances in which these munitions have been used. In addition we believe that new norms of international law need to be established in order to allow the world community to combat the humanitarian consequences of cluster munitions. From the outset, Austria has been amongst the consistently increasing number of those States that advocate the start of negotiations on a legally binding instrument that addresses the humanitarian concerns posed by cluster munitions. We continue to believe that it is urgent to take effective action to address the humanitarian concerns posed by cluster munitions. Only recently we have seen the terrible effects that these weapons can have. If we act now, we still can prevent most of the suffering that these weapons may cause in the future.

Co-Chairs,

I am pleased to inform this important conference that the Austrian Federal Government has, indeed, decided to take action in that regard. Meeting yesterday in Vienna, the Council of Ministers decided that Austria – while working closely with its partners within and outside the European Union – will continue to play a leading role in working actively towards an internationally binding instrument on cluster munitions which in our view should be as comprehensive as possible. In addition, the Council of Ministers also decided that Austria – pending a future legally binding international regulation – already now declares a national moratorium renouncing any use of cluster bombs or cluster munitions. It is to be noted that this moratorium will in no way interfere with Austria's military commitments in international crisis management operations. The Council of Ministers also decided to uphold the comprehensive moratorium, even if a future international Convention should fail to achieve such a far-reaching solution.

I have therefore been authorized by the Austrian Federal President acting upon a proposal by the Austrian Federal Government to present to you the following declaration, which in its English translation reads:

**“Declaration of the Republic of Austria concerning a moratorium on the use of cluster bombs and cluster munitions**

**The Republic of Austria declares that the Austrian Armed Forces until the elaboration of an adequate international regulation renounce the use of cluster bombs and cluster munitions.”**

Minister Stohre! Co-Chairs!

Let me conclude by assuring you of my government's full commitment to make progress on the issue of cluster munitions and also to make our work a real success. It is therefore a great pleasure for me to announce that the Austrian Government yesterday also declared its willingness to host a follow-up meeting in Vienna towards the end of the year. I thank you very much.