Media Information

The Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons
(Hofburg, 8 & 9 December 2014)

There is no mechanism in place anywhere to respond to the deliberate or inadvertent explosion of a nuclear weapon. Any use of nuclear weapons could cause the gravest humanitarian and environmental global consequences.

Their exact number is secret but consensus is that the legacy from the Cold War and other states’ nuclear weapons amounts to more than 16,000, of which 1,800 are on high alert. As long as they remain in their arsenals the risk of their use prevails.

Recent global tensions have underlined the challenge they pose while efforts towards nuclear disarmament have stalled and there are renewed risks from terrorism.

From 8 – 9 December 2014 the Government of Austria will host the ‘Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.’ It is the latest step in a growing global initiative to bring focus to the consequences of their use.

“As long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of their use - deliberately or inadvertently - remains real. Such a scenario, more than any other human action, has the potential of ending life on this planet as we know it. There could not and would not be a winner in such a scenario. We have the collective responsibility for ourselves and future generations to do our utmost that they will never be used again” Sebastian Kurz, Austrian Foreign Minister.

The Vienna Conference will build on an initiative launched in 2013 that draws to focus attention on the humanitarian consequences of and risks associated with nuclear weapons. There have been two international conferences on the dangers, in Oslo, Norway, in March 2013, and Nayarit, Mexico in February 2014. Since the launch of the initiative the number of states participating in the initiative has grown to 127 in Oslo to 146 in Nayarit.

The Vienna Conference will focus on the short and long term consequences of nuclear weapons explosions, on public health, the environment, climate disruption, food security, migration, development related issues, infrastructure, and other consequences.

It will also address various risks that could result in deliberate or accidental nuclear weapons explosions such as human error, negligence, miscalculation, technical errors and vulnerabilities of nuclear weapons and their infrastructure. Moreover, the Conference will give an overview on existing international law and the possible consequences of nuclear weapon explosions.
Participants in the Vienna Conference will include representatives of government, international organisations, academia, civil society and other experts. The goal of the Vienna Conference is to draw attention to the urgent need for nuclear disarmament to prevent irreparable harm.

For questions with regard to contents please contact:  
Austrian Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs,  
hinw14vienna-media@bmeia.gv.at, +43 190115 3320