



ICRC

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**Panel Discussion**

**on**

**"Putting Hiroshima's Experience into Action for the Future"**

Statement of the

International Committee of the Red Cross

delivered by

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Towards the 2015 NPT Review Conference:

“Putting Hiroshima’s Experience in Action for the Future”

Dear Distinguished Guests,

To begin, the ICRC would like to warmly acknowledge and welcome the efforts of Governor Yuzaki and the work of the Hiroshima Prefecture for their commitment to advance nuclear disarmament. The "Hiroshima for Global Peace" Plan is an important contribution to the work in this area. Likewise, the work of Mayor Matsui and the Mayors for Peace are also to be commended for making important contributions to the goal of nuclear disarmament, such as the 2020 Vision Campaign.

The ICRC and the city of Hiroshima have a unique bond. Shortly after the bombing of the city an ICRC delegate reached Hiroshima and sent a telegram describing the horrific situation. I will just quote a few lines of what he saw, *“Conditions appalling. City wiped out. Eighty percent of all hospitals destroyed or seriously damaged. Inspected two emergency hospitals, conditions beyond description. Effect of bomb mysteriously serious. Many victims apparently recovering suddenly suffer fatal relapse due to decomposition of white blood cells and other internal injuries, now dying in great numbers. Estimated still over one hundred thousand wounded in emergency hospitals located surroundings. Sadly lacking bandaging materials, medicines.”*

A second delegate, Dr Marcel Junod, then head of the ICRC's delegation in Japan, came to the city a few days later. He was the first foreign doctor to arrive there and was immediately struck by the level of devastation and suffering. The blast had left Hiroshima's medical infrastructure in tatters with 90% of its doctors injured or dead. As Dr. Junod visited patients suffering from the delayed effects of radiation exposure, he wrote: *“They need small blood transfusions at regular intervals; but there are no donors, no doctors to determine the compatibility of the blood groups; consequently, there is no treatment”*. The Japanese Red Cross and the ICRC did what they could to aid the victims, but it was clearly not enough to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the blast.

The ICRC learned many things from its work in Hiroshima. We learned that the casualties and damage caused by the detonation of a nuclear bomb are immense; that when nuclear weapons are used, the normal systems and services for helping the victims are, in an instant, wiped out or severely damaged, making the provision of adequate assistance nearly impossible in the aftermath; that many more people will die from radiation sickness in the weeks and months following an explosion than at the time of the detonation; and finally, that civilian casualties and suffering are likely to continue for years to come, caused by the development of cancers such as thyroid cancer and leukaemia, and that over time the death toll will continue to rise.

A few years ago, the ICRC conducted an in-depth assessment of its own capacity, and that of other agencies, to help the victims of nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical weapons if such weapons were used today. We have concluded that an effective means of assisting a substantial portion of survivors of a nuclear detonation, while adequately protecting those delivering assistance, is not currently available at the national level and not feasible at the international level. It's unlikely that the immense investment required to develop such a response capacity will ever be made. If made, it would likely remain insufficient.

This study as well as our experience in Hiroshima helped shaped the ICRC's views on nuclear weapons. In national, regional and multilateral fora we regularly stress four main points:

- Nuclear weapons are unique in their destructive power, in the unspeakable human suffering they cause, in the impossibility of controlling their effects in space and time, in the risks of escalation they create, and in the threat they pose to the environment, to future generations, and indeed to the survival of humanity.
- It is difficult to envisage how any use of nuclear weapons could be compatible with the rules of international humanitarian law.
- Regardless of their views on the legality of nuclear weapons, States must ensure that they are never again used.
- Preventing the use of nuclear weapons requires fulfilment of existing obligations to pursue negotiations aimed at prohibiting and completely eliminating such weapons through a legally binding international treaty.

These points are also the primary elements of the historic resolution on nuclear weapons that was adopted by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in 2011. The resolution sets out the Movement's position on nuclear weapons and also aims to raise awareness of our concerns among the public, scientists, health professionals and decision-makers at the national level. In November 2013, the Movement took an additional step when it adopted a "Four-year Action Plan" outlining activities that national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies could undertake in their countries to help achieve this. The Japanese Red Cross societies, alongside the ICRC, the IFRC and 40 other national societies co-sponsored the resolution.

It is clear to us that the international debate on nuclear weapons continues to evolve. For decades, the discussion about these weapons has focused on military doctrine and security issues. Today it is increasingly encompassing the short, medium and long-term consequences of nuclear weapons. The 2013 Oslo Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons and the Second Conference held in Nayarit, Mexico were important events that have helped to deepen our understanding of the effects of nuclear weapons on public health, development, human security and the environment. The conference taking place in Vienna later this year will advance these discussions even further. As highlighted by the statement made by New Zealand on behalf of 125 countries during 2013 session of the First Committee of the UNGA the humanitarian focus of the debate about nuclear weapons "*is now well established on the global agenda*" and "*all efforts must be exerted to eliminate the threat of these weapons of mass destruction.*"

The ICRC welcomes these developments. It is our sincere hope that the lessons learned from the past and the new insights gained from Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna will guide States as they consider how to best advance nuclear disarmament in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In closing, I would highlight that the bond between ICRC and Hiroshima continues to grow. Last August, a descendant of a Gingko biloba tree that survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 was planted at a ceremony at the ICRC's headquarters in Geneva. This tree stands as a reminder of the horrific suffering that befell the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the ICRC's experience there. It is also a sign of hope – hope that as it grows so too will the actions to eliminate nuclear weapons once and for all time.

Thank you.