

**International Conference
'The Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons'
Oslo 4–5 March 2013**

**Intervention presented by Australian Red Cross
on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent
Societies**

On behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the IFRC) I am honoured to deliver this statement and at the outset endorse the principled and very welcome statement by Peter Maurer the President of the ICRC made at the opening of this historic conference. The international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement share a strong and united commitment to strengthen International Humanitarian Law on the issue of nuclear weapons.

The IFRC also congratulates and applauds the representatives of Governments who have come here to Oslo to participate in this important global gathering which is examining the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.

Let me deal conclusively with any suggestion that Red Cross and Red Crescent and the global humanitarian community can ever effectively respond to the aftermath of a nuclear conflict should this unspeakable event ever occur in our lifetimes.

As everyone knows the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is recognised globally as having a leading and clear role to play in minimising the impacts of disaster and disease and responding to the needs of those made vulnerable by emergencies. Our national societies in 187 countries around the world have an outstanding record of working as Auxiliaries to your Governments in emergency and ongoing humanitarian responses. This is our core business and our core work and when our Movement speaks on this issue we ask the world to listen.

The world's largest humanitarian organisation has a permanent presence in almost every country in the world and the capacity to mount a global response to address humanitarian needs in response to disasters, such as we have seen with the earthquake in Haiti, floods and earthquakes in Pakistan and the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant accident in Japan. But even large, expert organisations such as the Movement, and actors such as the United Nations, for all their vast resources and expertise, have seen that humanitarian responders can be overwhelmed. The 2004 tsunami which killed over 230,000 people pushed the world's humanitarian responders to their coping capacity.

However these challenges – at both local and international levels – are not in any way remotely comparable to the unprecedented and insurmountable

humanitarian challenges the use of nuclear weapons would create. The humanitarian consequences of the blast, heat, electromagnetic pulse and radiation associated with nuclear explosions are inconceivable for medical and humanitarian responders. The total destruction of not just the impact site but extensive areas surrounding the impact site are forgone conclusions, making the ability of those left to respond almost non-existent. The loss of life and incapacitation of trained medical and humanitarian response personnel, and loss and damage to property and stocks of resources used for emergency response, would significantly impact on any possible response. Inability to safely access the affected area would also hamper the response. Caring for survivors is always extremely difficult in natural disaster events, but in the case of the use of a nuclear weapon, and not even being able to access those affected, it would be impossible.

Furthermore, the longer term response would clearly be beyond any organisation's capacity to respond. One of the major challenges for humanitarian responders in the longer term is the restoration of livelihoods. The devastating effects of flooding, fires, cyclones and earthquakes provide enough challenges with respect to the restoration of livelihoods. Nuclear fallout and its long term destructive nature mean that vast tracts of land would be unable to be used by humans for an indefinite period of time. Communities would cease to exist. The spread of radiation would not just affect the current generation but generations to come. The displacement of people would be an insurmountable global issue. Global mass starvation would be a very real possibility. And, if you look at the projects of humanitarian organisations over the years since the 2004 tsunami which focused on rebuilding lives and livelihoods, and consider almost ten years after a nuclear explosion, none of those programs would even have been able to have been started in the affected areas due to radiation and environmental destruction.

The global community has been told by many sources, including the British and American Medical Associations and the World Health Organisation that there is no possibility of an adequate medical response to the use of a nuclear weapon.

Today, however, we are not talking about the possibility of another Hiroshima and Nagasaki, horrendous as they were. We are facing the prospect of something much, much worse. Today the destructive force of the world's nuclear arsenal is equivalent to approximately 150,000 Hiroshima bombs. A 'small' nuclear warhead by today's standards has the explosive yield of around 20 times the Hiroshima bomb. Humanity has no response to such brutality. The destruction caused by nuclear weapons is beyond a humanitarian response. The global medical and humanitarian communities are clear. Nobody has the capability to mount a sufficient response to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapon use.

There is no doubt that in the catastrophic event of the use of nuclear weapons the international community will look to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the wider international humanitarian community including the UN and NGOs to provide vital humanitarian assistance. Our

inability to adequately respond to such a situation is clear. Like the World Health Organisation and the Medical Associations of the world, the world's largest humanitarian organisation has no answer to nuclear weapons other than their complete abolition and ensuring that they are never used again.

It is for this compelling reason that at the November 2011 Council of Delegates meeting, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement meeting adopted a resolution calling for a world free of nuclear weapons and appealing to all States to ensure that nuclear weapons are never again used. In the spirit of this resolution we call on all governments to pursue in good faith and conclude with urgency and determination, negotiations to prohibit the use of and completely eliminate nuclear weapons through a legally binding international agreement, based on existing commitments and international obligations.

We urge you to work together to take the necessary and constructive leadership to achieve this convention.

For our part we in the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world, will walk with you on that journey -- engaging through humanitarian diplomacy with governments, and raising awareness among the public, scientists, health professionals and decision makers about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, the international humanitarian law issues that arise from such use and the need for concrete actions to achieve the Convention.

With the lack of any available humanitarian response we believe that the people of the world are strongly behind the need for further regulation, such as a Convention, and we are committed to mobilising the power of humanity to achieve that outcome which may well help change the course of human history.

In the grand sweep of human history there are great land marks of humanitarian progress which have taken us to a better place. This occurred with the achievement of conventions on Biological and Chemical weapons; land mines and cluster munitions.

It is now time that we deal decisively with nuclear weapons. This is truly an idea whose time has come and Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will work with you and the people of the world to make this happen.