

**International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons
Oslo, 4-5 March 2013**

**Opening address on behalf of Ms. Valerie Amos, United Nations Emergency Relief
Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs,
4 March 2013**

**Delivered by Mr. Rashid Khalikov,
Director of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Geneva**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to commend your Excellency, Foreign Minister Eide, and the Government of Norway, for convening this important conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. Critical though this issue is, it has not received sufficient attention to date. We therefore welcome this initiative and look forward to the important discussions to follow.

I have the pleasure to represent Ms. Valerie Amos, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has in recent years become increasingly concerned at the humanitarian impact of different types of weapons on civilians.

To date, we have focused mostly on landmines and cluster munitions. Their use has been shown to pose a particular threat to civilians, as well as to the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance and safety of humanitarian workers.

More recently, we have focused greater attention on the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in general, especially their use in populated areas.

By explosive weapons, I mean weapons such as artillery shells, missiles, mortars, aircraft bombs, and improvised explosive devices. The feature common to these weapons is that they are indiscriminate within their zones of blast and fragmentation. This makes their use highly problematic in populated areas, both in the short and longer-term.

Nuclear weapons are a type of explosive weapon we have not sufficiently considered in terms of humanitarian impact. Yet these weapons are also indiscriminate within their zone of blast, and will almost always have a catastrophic and devastating humanitarian impact because of their destructive power.

Depending on its size, the detonation of a single nuclear weapon in an urban area could cause hundreds of thousands of casualties, massive physical destruction and have far reaching social and economic consequences. The detonation of several such weapons

could have severe environmental consequences as well.

Thankfully, the United Nations has not yet been called upon to respond to the aftermath of a nuclear weapon detonation. Nor have we, as United Nations humanitarian and development agencies, undertaken sufficient analysis of the extent to which we could respond.

We have some experience in helping to respond to the aftermath of nuclear accidents at civilian facilities, such as Chernobyl in 1986. More recently, United Nations agencies assisted with the response to the accident at the Fukushima power plant, following the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

The Fukushima accident led to reflection on our collective capacity to respond to a nuclear accident. The United Nations Secretary-General requested a system-wide study on the impact of the accident.

The Secretary-General also requested OCHA to study ways to strengthen the link between the international system of response to nuclear and radiological emergencies on the one hand, and the international humanitarian coordination system on the other. Tomorrow, I shall present some findings from this study for the preparedness and response capacity of the international humanitarian system.

It is significant that the consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation were excluded from the study's scope because of the unthinkable magnitude of such a disaster for effective humanitarian response.

As mentioned by the President of the ICRC, Mr. Maurer, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Guterres, the international humanitarian community would face formidable and even insurmountable challenges in adequately preparing for or responding to nuclear weapons detonation.

For example, issues include how to ensure meaningful presence on the ground to conduct relief operations without putting our colleagues at unacceptable risk.

We need to consider the specialist training and equipment that humanitarian workers would need and the level of investment this would require.

Consideration would need to be given to the level of national and local capacity that would likely remain and with which we can work.

There are questions concerning how quickly we could assess needs, deliver uncontaminated food and water, deploy sufficient and specialist medical expertise and supplies and disseminate information to the affected people.

We would need to consider the implications of such an event for massive human displacement, within and across borders, and how we would respond to this.

This conference is a welcome opportunity to begin to take stock of the extent to which the humanitarian system can respond effectively to save and rebuild the lives of those who survive such a catastrophe.

If we cannot respond effectively – and our assessment to date is that we cannot – then it underlines our common responsibility to do everything we can to prevent the use of these weapons.

I wish you every success in your discussions.

Thank you for your attention.