

„The Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons”, Oslo, 4-5 March 2013

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Thank you Madam Chair,

When Swiss experts recently examined preparedness to deal with CBRN events, it became clear that for a major nuclear event civil cantonal and federal authorities would be underprepared.

Many of these first responders – as we mentioned yesterday with regard to the scenario for our capital Bern – would themselves be directly affected and unable to assist victims.

Thanks to the decentralized structure of our military, certain troops with specialized gear could come to help. But this would take time and there would be communication, coordination, and psychological challenges of a magnitude that these troops have never experienced in their training.

Let me highlight some concrete problems:

Measuring: We have made significant investments in pre-installed and mobile nuclear detection devices. But even with this, our authorities have serious doubts whether we could deal with the radiation problem in an effective, timely and appropriate manner.

Decontamination: Another challenge would be decontamination. We have advanced mobile decontamination facilities – mainly with the fire brigades. But they are neither equipped nor prepared to decontaminate larger quantities of people or material within a short time frame or over an extended period of time.

Evacuation: We have emergency evacuation models for major earthquakes. We agree with the delegation of New Zealand that a nuclear detonation is a totally different ball game. After a major nuclear event, we are dealing with a much more complex environment and we would be faced with far more complex injuries. In

addition, we would see much more severe psychological effects – both on the victims and the responders.

Medical support: Much of the medical infrastructure could be directly affected by the nuclear explosion or become inoperative later on as a consequence of power failures, etc. Therefore, the availability of appropriate medical equipment and care would be a major concern. Particularly patients with severe burns would be a challenge, given the very limited number of specialized treatment units that exist in Switzerland.

Nuclear shelters: Switzerland is well known to have a high number of nuclear shelters. Massive concrete walls unquestionably protect against the effects of a nuclear explosion. But our long experience with such shelters has highlighted many unresolved conceptual and practical questions. For instance, how do you provide medical support for people in the shelters? How do you tackle psychological effects of people in the shelters? And of course the bunkers would be of no use if there is no advance warning. Nuclear shelters can save lives, but they will definitely not solve the humanitarian problem resulting from a nuclear explosion.

To sum up, Switzerland might be better prepared than many other countries to deal with some CBRN events, but we are under no illusion that we would be overwhelmed by the response required in the event of a nuclear explosion. Its effect would go far beyond what we are prepared for. And such a crisis would last much longer than any response we would be able to deliver. So here we reach the same conclusions as the experts on the panel that adequate national response capacities do not exist to deal with this scenario. We also heard from the ICRC that there is no effective assistance at the international level to deal with these humanitarian consequences. But the picture is equally bleak if we look at the wider impact and the longer term consequences. We heard yesterday how complex they are and we discussed the global dimension of these consequences. And clearly, at an international level we are not prepared to deal with them. It would require an unprecedented level of international cooperation and coordination. And such efforts would also be severely hampered or even rendered totally impossible if a major UN centre like New York or Geneva were to be the affected area of a nuclear detonation.