

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

Nosizwe Baqwa, 4 March 2013

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

I am speaking on behalf of ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

The use of a nuclear weapon on a major populated area would immediately kill tens if not hundreds of thousands of people – mothers, fathers and children.

Hundreds of thousands more would be alive – but injured. Blinded, burned and crushed.

Later in this meeting we will hear more about the long-term damage that these weapons can do to society and to the environment.

But the immediate effects of just a single nuclear weapon are shocking and overwhelming enough. They go far beyond what can be considered acceptable.

The blinding flash leaves people sightless – although blinding weapons have been outlawed.

The massive blast will level cities – although carpet bombing with conventional explosive weapons has been outlawed.

The searing heat and spreading fires will melt steel, engulf homes and can coalesce into a firestorm that will suck the air from anyone still breathing – though incendiary weapons are outlawed from use in urban areas.

And the survivors of these effects may yet be poisoned by radioactive fallout – that breaks down their bodies over the days and weeks that follow – though the use of poison has been outlawed in war.

Over the weekend before this conference, the partner organisations of ICAN came together here in Oslo. We heard the testimony of Hibakusha, survivors who still carry the memories of these horrific humanitarian effects.

Their voices reaffirm the simple facts – that the immediate effects of these weapons alone make them unacceptable.

As the honourable Hibakusha, Dr. Tanaka, said in the previous session, the image of the nuclear bomb explosion is often represented by the massive mushroom cloud, like the ones you saw in several of the earlier presentations. He gives us a harrowing notion, when he asks us to use the worst part of our imagination to try to visualise the thousands of faces within that mushroom; of the fire, the smoke, the fear and the confusion. The faces of the women, the men, and the children.

That nuclear weapons have not already been clearly declared illegal – to sit, outdated, alongside the other weapons of mass destruction – is a failure of our collective social responsibility.

The time has come for committed states to correct that failure.

Thank you.