



ICRC

Please check against delivery

**High-level Meeting of the
United Nations General Assembly
on
Nuclear Disarmament**

Statement
of the
International Committee of the Red Cross
delivered by
Christine Beerli, Vice-President

New York, 26 September 2013

Ladies and gentlemen,

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, and in the threat that they pose to the environment, to future generations, and indeed to the survival of humanity. These basic facts underlie the long-standing concerns of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) about nuclear weapons and their consequences in humanitarian terms.

The ICRC's views about nuclear weapons are shaped by our experience, and that of the Japanese Red Cross, in responding to the challenges that arose from the use of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both cities experienced immense levels of death and injury, the catastrophic destruction of medical and other infrastructure, and the immediate and long-term impact of ionizing radiation. Such consequences are unacceptable. They also raise serious questions about the compatibility of these weapons with international humanitarian law.

The use of even a single nuclear weapon raises a fundamental question: Who will assist the victims of a nuclear detonation, and how? This is not a rhetorical question. It was the starting-point of the ICRC's recent in-depth assessment of its own capacity, and that of other organizations, to help the victims of nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical weapons. The ICRC's assessment, which it conducted from 2006 to 2009, concluded that the means to assist a substantial portion of survivors, while adequately protecting those delivering aid, is not currently available at the national level in most countries, and is not feasible at the international level. Unfortunately, there has been no significant progress internationally since the ICRC first reached this conclusion several years ago.

In 2011, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which is comprised of the ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies in 188 countries, adopted an historic position on nuclear weapons. In this document, the Movement emphasizes its humanitarian concerns about nuclear weapons and finds it difficult to envisage how any use of nuclear weapons could be compatible with the rules of international humanitarian law. It also calls on all States to ensure that nuclear weapons are never again used, and to pursue negotiations to prohibit and completely eliminate such weapons through a legally binding international agreement. We reiterate these appeals here today.

In closing, the ICRC welcomes recent initiatives to advance multilateral nuclear disarmament undertaken both within and outside traditional forums. In our view, these initiatives have opened up new opportunities to achieve the complete prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. The ICRC appeals to States, and all those in a position to influence them, to seize, with urgency and determination, these unique opportunities to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end.

Thank you.