

**Message of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
To the 2022 World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs**

August 2022

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) extends its deep appreciation and heartfelt gratitude to the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (Gensuikyo) for its long-standing efforts to preserve and uphold the testimonies and memory of the Hibakusha and other victims of the atomic bombings in 1945 and to provide assistance to survivors.

We, at the ICRC and the Japanese Red Cross Society, witnessed first-hand the suffering and devastation brought upon ordinary citizens – women, men, boys and girls – of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as we tried, in near-impossible conditions, to assist the dying and injured. We, along with so many others, have since been saying “never again”.

Today, after decades of persistence and determination, a treaty establishing a global, unequivocal, comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons – the most catastrophic weapons ever created – is a reality. We owe this reality largely to the unwavering courage and hope of survivors of nuclear weapons use and testing, who drove our efforts since the beginning and who never cease to inspire us.

The continued existence of nuclear weapons is one of the biggest threats for humanity. There are currently more than 13,000 of these weapons in the world, many on high alert status, ready to be launched at a moment’s notice. The risk that they may be used again is unacceptable. Such use would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences, capable of endangering the very survival of our planet.

If a nuclear weapon were to detonate in or near a populated area, no State or international body could adequately address the immediate humanitarian emergency nor the long-term consequences, nor provide sufficient assistance to victims.

At a time when, against the backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine, nuclear deterrence theories seem to be regaining vigour, it is critical to refocus the debate on the human cost of nuclear weapons. This is the benchmark against which the moral, ethical and legal acceptability of a weapon is to be judged, and deterrence theories are to be evaluated.

Indeed, while the professed purpose of nuclear deterrence is to maintain national and regional security, the existence of nuclear weapons poses major risks to human security – including health and well-being, and environmental, food and economic security.

In light of these consequences, in the ICRC’s view, it is extremely doubtful that nuclear weapons could ever be used in accordance with the rules and principles of international humanitarian law. Moreover, any use of nuclear weapons would be abhorrent to the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience. Any threat to use nuclear weapons is in the ICRC’s view equally abhorrent because it implies the possibility of actually using them.

On 23 June 2022, the First Meeting of States Parties to the historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons took important decisions for the future implementation of the Treaty, including measures to assist the victims of nuclear weapons use and testing and to remediate the natural environment affected. The TPNW brings us one step closer to a nuclear-weapon-free-world, although the road ahead is still long. The ICRC calls on all States that have not yet done so to join the TPNW without delay.

Also, in June this year, the entire Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement reaffirmed its commitment to work towards the elimination of nuclear weapons through the adoption of a strong resolution and an ambitious multi-year action plan.

As the 10th Review Conference to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons unfolds, we call on States Parties to keep the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons at the centre of their deliberations and to urgently take concrete steps to implement their nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments. Nuclear-weapon States and their allies have a particular responsibility in this respect.

Eliminating nuclear weapons is an urgent humanitarian imperative. Keeping the experience and testimonies of the hibakusha alive, including through educating the younger generation, is crucial to achieve this goal.

I wish you every success for this conference and for your future work.

Peter Maurer
President
International Committee of the Red Cross