

Message of the ICRC to the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would like to begin by commending the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (Gensuikyo) for its invaluable work in support of the victims of the atomic bombings and its persistent efforts to help advance nuclear disarmament.

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, in the risks of escalation they create, in the threat they pose to the environment, to future generations, and, indeed, to the survival of humanity. The city of Nagasaki knows that too well, as it felt, in its flesh, in its mind, in its heart the catastrophic consequences of the second atomic bomb ever used in the world.

Today, 69 years after the disaster, victims of the bomb still suffer the long-term effects on human health and on the genetics of survivors. These effects have been confirmed by research and have been witnessed and treated for nearly seven decades by the Japanese Red Cross hospitals in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This suffering has been formally recognized in 2010 by the 190 States party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Having recognized the inevitability of the humanitarian consequences of the use of the atomic bomb, all States Parties should now strive to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used, to formally prohibit their use, and to eliminate nuclear weapons through a legally binding treaty.

However, preventing the use of nuclear weapons also requires efforts by civil society to apply pressure on all States to ensure that these weapons are never again used, regardless of any opinions about the legality of such use. Today, therefore, the ICRC, as it started to do on 5 September 1945, less than a month after the second atomic bomb struck Nagasaki, maintains its steady efforts to mobilise the community of states and the people of good will to support its commitment to prevent any future use of nuclear weapons.

The international community has not always seized upon opportunities to prevent human suffering. In the case of nuclear weapons, Nagasaki, 69 years after the tragedy, remind us that prevention, including the development of a legally binding treaty to prohibit and eliminate such weapons, is the only way forward.

Peter Maurer

President

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