

ICAN welcomes Red Cross call for a global nuclear weapons ban

GENEVA – The Council of Delegates of the world’s national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies have approved an historic resolution calling for the total elimination of nuclear weapons and pledging their determination to work towards this common security goal.

The resolution, which reflects growing global anxiety about the humanitarian consequences of continuing reliance on nuclear weapons in the 21st century, stated that the Red Cross and Red Crescent delegates were “deeply concerned about the destructive power of nuclear weapons, the unspeakable human suffering they cause, the difficulty of controlling their effects in space and time, the threat they pose to the environment and to future generations and the risks of escalation they create”.

The ground-breaking resolution, which marks a resurgence of international concern about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of using nuclear weapons, comes 66 years after atomic weapons were used on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Red Cross doctors helped the survivors in the devastated cities and their shocking reports prompted the first ever Red Cross appeal to ban nuclear weapons.

The resolution was welcomed by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which represents more than 200 non-governmental organizations advocating for a ban on nuclear weapons. “This is a momentous event,” said Arielle Denis, Senior Campaigner of ICAN. “It’s the recognition that nuclear disarmament is a humanitarian imperative, and that any use of nuclear weapons would cause unacceptable harm.”

The resolution for the first time raises deep concerns regarding the “implications of any use of nuclear weapons for humanitarian assistance activities and food production over wide areas of the world”. These concerns are confirmed by new studies showing that if even 0.4 percent of the world’s current arsenals were exploded in a regional war, clouds of radioactive dust in the atmosphere would cause abrupt climate change, freezing temperatures and agricultural collapse, resulting in global famine, disease and millions of additional deaths.

“This historic vote is a giant step forward for the move to abolish all nuclear weapons,” commented Dr. Ira Helfand, North American Vice-President, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), a founding member of ICAN. “Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are uniquely positioned to educate the public about the dangers of nuclear war so that people understand the full nature of the humanitarian disaster that would follow even the limited use of these weapons.”

More than one year ago, addressing diplomats at the ICRC's headquarters in Geneva, the organisation's president Jakob Kellenberger declared that "Nations have a historic and unprecedented opportunity to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end". The adoption of this resolution and the concerns it raises confirm that the world cannot afford to wait.

As noted by the President of ICAN for Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Dr Rebecca Johnson: "It is not a matter of 'if' nuclear weapons will be banned, it's only a matter of 'when'. With nuclear dangers increasing daily, governments need to start negotiations on a nuclear weapons ban as a matter of urgency. We can't keep letting the nuclear-armed states create obstacles to disarmament while more countries like North Korea and Iran get nuclear weapon capabilities."