

## **ICAN launches study on catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons**

MELBOURNE – To mark the 67th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has launched a publication detailing the “catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons on our health, societies and the environment”. The publication argues for nuclear weapons to be banned just as other inherently inhumane and indiscriminate weapons – such as landmines and cluster munitions – have been prohibited by treaties.

“Although the number of nuclear weapons in global stockpiles is declining, the risk of their use, by accident or design, appears to be growing. Any such use would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences,” the report says. “The death toll from a nuclear attack against a large city today could be measured in the millions rather than the tens or hundreds of thousands.”

Today there are still an estimated 19,000 nuclear weapons in the world, around 2,000 of which are kept on hair-trigger alert. Most are dozens of times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb, which killed approximately 140,000 people by the end of 1945. In addition to those who died from the effects of the uranium bomb’s heat and blast, many thousands suffered from radiation-related illnesses in the months, years and decades afterwards.

In May 2010 five nuclear-armed nations – the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China – joined more than 100 nations in expressing their “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons”, when they adopted the final document of the Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference. Many governments are pushing for a universal nuclear weapons ban, as has been proposed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The ICAN study released today provides information on the immediate and long-term effects of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, the harm caused by internal and external exposure to radiation, the likelihood of global climate disruption and widespread famine in the event of a regional nuclear war, the harm caused by nuclear testing and nuclear weapons production, and the opportunity costs of investing in nuclear armaments.

The study warns: “A nuclear attack anywhere in the world would overwhelm the health infrastructure, making an effective humanitarian response impossible.” It urges organizations involved in work related to human rights, development, the environment, food security, poverty alleviation and refugees to join forces to demand negotiations for a nuclear weapons ban.

ICAN is calling on nations to begin work on a ban without further delay and to continue their negotiations uninterrupted until a successful conclusion is reached. “Abolishing nuclear weapons is a paramount challenge for people and governments the world over – a pre-condition for survival, sustainability and the health of our planet and future generations,” the report states.