

**Message of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
To the 2021 World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs**

August 2021

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 painful memories caused by the atomic bombings in 1945 and to provide assistance to victims and survivors.

76 years have passed from the days when nuclear weapons – among the most horrific and inhumane weapons ever created – were unleashed upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The ICRC and the Japanese Red Cross Society witnessed first-hand the suffering and devastation that followed as they tried, in near-impossible conditions, to assist the dying and injured. Faced with helplessness in front of this disaster of vast proportions, we called for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons – and to this call we have stood ever since.

But the story of nuclear weapons is not only one of horror, fear and pain – it is also a story of courage and determination. The testimonies of the hibakusha tell this story, and it was they who inspired and drove the international community to achieve the unimaginable: the negotiation and adoption of an international legally-binding instrument making nuclear weapons illegal once and for all.

There are currently more than 13,000 nuclear 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 remains very high. To believe that this risk can be eliminated while nuclear weapons still exist is, in itself, a risk humanity cannot afford to take. To cling on to nuclear weapons as an instrument of security is an equally dangerous fallacy: for most States, nuclear weapons are today a major source of insecurity for their populations and for the future of our planet.

We remain deeply concerned at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, to which the international community would be unable to respond. We know that no adequate assistance capacities to provide humanitarian relief in such a case exist at national or international levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the significant shortcomings of public health-care systems when responding to large-scale health emergencies. This only pales in comparison to the insurmountable challenges that any use of nuclear weapons would present to health-care systems and humanitarian response capabilities. What we cannot prepare for, we must prevent.

On 22 January 2021, the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entered into force. The testimonies and experience of the hibakusha, the long-standing appeals of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the tireless efforts of determined activists, led to this historic moment. The TPNW comprehensively prohibits nuclear weapons and makes clear that any use of these weapons is morally and legally unacceptable. It is extremely doubtful that any use of nuclear weapons could ever be compatible with international humanitarian law, the law regulating conduct in war.

This treaty exists because we cannot afford to forget, lest the horrors of history are repeated. Let us all strive to keep the testimonies of the hibakusha alive, as a beacon to guide humanity towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

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

Peter Maurer
President
International Committee of the Red Cross