



ICRC

Speech by Peter Maurer TPNW Signing Ceremony 22 September 2022

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

A decade ago, a world free from the scourge of nuclear weapons may have seemed illusory. 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 tireless efforts of many: States, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, civil society organizations, and the unwavering courage and hope of survivors of nuclear weapons use and testing, who raised their voice to say: “never again”.

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.

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.

In 1945, the International Committee of the Red Cross, alongside the Japanese Red Cross Society, witnessed first-hand the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons as we attempted, in near-impossible conditions, to assist the dying and injured in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons aims to ensure that this unspeakable horror is not repeated. The comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons is a crucial step towards their elimination, which is a vital responsibility of the international community as a whole.

I commend those States who have made the courageous choice to sign or ratify this landmark Treaty today. By doing so, you are joining its 66 States Parties and 20 Signatories in shaping the future of nuclear disarmament. The ICRC is ready to assist you in your efforts.

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. The alarmingly regular references to the potential use of nuclear weapons are a wake-up call in this respect. Seldom have collective action and concrete, meaningful steps to reduce the risk of use and free the world of the dark shadow of nuclear weapons been more urgent.

On 23 June 2022, the First Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW reaffirmed the place and added value of the Treaty in the broader nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, which it builds upon, contributes to and complements. It also 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. I call on all States that have not yet done so to join the TPNW without delay.

By doing so, States are fulfilling their duty to protect humanity from nuclear catastrophe, and their common responsibility to take effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. Our common humanity, our survival and that of future generations, depend on it.

The ICRC, and the broader Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, will continue to work tirelessly to strengthen the membership of the TPNW and its implementation, and to promote nuclear disarmament, until the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons becomes reality.

Thank you.