



Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Joint Statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons

**Delivered by Ambassador Abdul Samad Minty, Permanent Representative of South Africa
to the United Nations at Geneva, 24 April 2013**

Chairperson,

I am taking the floor on behalf of the following States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), namely Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Belarus, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Cambodia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Georgia, Grenada, Guatemala, Holy See, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Samoa, Singapore, Swaziland, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, Uruguay, Yemen, Zambia and my own country South Africa.

Our countries are deeply concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. While this has been known since nuclear weapons were first developed and is reflected in various UN resolutions and multilateral instruments, it has not been at the core of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation deliberations for many years. Although it constitutes the *raison d'être* of the NPT, which cautions against the *"devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples"*, this issue has consistently been ignored in the discourse on nuclear weapons.

Yet, past experience from the use and testing of nuclear weapons has amply demonstrated the unacceptable harm caused by the immense, uncontrollable destructive capability and indiscriminate nature of these weapons. The effects of a nuclear weapon detonation are not constrained by national borders - it is therefore an issue of deep concern to all. Beyond the immediate death and destruction caused by a detonation, socio-economic development will be impeded, the environment will be destroyed, and future generations will be robbed of their health, food, water and other vital resources.

In recent years, the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons has increasingly been recognised as a fundamental and global concern that must be at the core of all deliberations on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. This issue is now firmly established on the global agenda: The 2010 Review Conference of the NPT expressed *"deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons"*. Similarly, the 2011 resolution of

the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement emphasised the incalculable human suffering associated with any use of nuclear weapons, and the implications for international humanitarian law.

The March 2013 Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons held in Oslo presented a platform to engage in a fact-based discussion on the impact of a nuclear weapon detonation. The broad participation at the Conference reflects the recognition that the catastrophic effects of a detonation are of concern and relevance to all. A key message from experts and international organisations is that no State or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation or provide adequate assistance to victims. We warmly welcome Mexico's announcement of a follow-up Conference to further broaden and deepen understanding of this matter and the resolve of the international community to address the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.

It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances. The catastrophic effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, cannot be adequately addressed. All efforts must be exerted to eliminate this threat. The only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is through their total elimination. It is a shared responsibility of all States to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, to prevent their vertical and horizontal proliferation and to achieve nuclear disarmament, including through fulfilling the objectives of the NPT and achieving its universality. The full implementation of the 2010 Action Plan and previous outcomes aimed at achieving the objectives of the NPT must therefore not be postponed any further.

Addressing the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons is an absolute necessity. As an element that underpins the NPT, it is essential that the humanitarian consequences inform our work and actions during the current Review Cycle and beyond.

This is an issue that affects not only governments, but each and every citizen of our interconnected world. By raising awareness about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, civil society has a crucial role to play, side-by-side with governments, as we fulfil our responsibilities. We owe it to future generations to work together to rid our world of the threat posed by nuclear weapons.

I thank you.