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Working towards the elimination of nuclear weapons: 2022–2027 action plan

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PROGRESS REPORT

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PROGRESS REPORT

Working towards the elimination of nuclear weapons: 2022–2027 action plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2022–2027 Action Plan on the Non-Use, Prohibition and Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (2022–2027 action plan) is informed by the long-standing efforts of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) to place the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, the rules and principles of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the interests of humanity at the centre of the nuclear weapons debate. The 2022–2027 action plan builds upon the success of the Action Plan on the Non-Use, Prohibition and Elimination of Nuclear Weapons 2018–2021 and aims to:

- promote adherence to and full implementation, by all States, of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and, as applicable, regional treaties establishing nuclear weapon-free zones;
- further raise awareness of the incalculable human suffering, including the gendered impacts, that can be expected to result from any use of nuclear weapons, and of the lack of any adequate humanitarian response capacity to meet the needs of victims;
- raise awareness of the high and increasing risk of use of nuclear weapons, and promote concrete measures by all States to reduce this risk and work towards the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons to ensure that they are never used again;
- promote a better understanding, in particular among young people, of the experiences of survivors of past atomic bombings (a.k.a. hibakusha) and nuclear testing, and of the humanitarian, environmental and development implications of any use of nuclear weapons.

Since June 2022, components of the Movement have engaged in a wide range of national and international activities in pursuit of these aims. In an extremely challenging international environment, with the risk of the use of nuclear weapons growing alarmingly, these activities have produced modest but promising results. Successful implementation of the plan will require scaling up these activities and making sure Movement components are engaged worldwide.

1) BACKGROUND

This report summarizes the main developments and achievements in relation to implementing Resolution 7 of the 2022 Council of Delegates and the accompanying 2022–2027 action plan. Resolution 7 invites the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other Movement components “to support the implementation of the 2022–2027 action plan and to report, as necessary, to the sessions of the Council of Delegates on the progress made on the implementation of the resolution”.

Section 2A below gives examples of activities undertaken by components of the Movement at the national and international levels to implement the 2022–2027 action plan. Section 2B analyses the current global situation with respect to the elimination of nuclear weapons and assesses overall progress towards meeting the objectives of the 2022–2027 action plan in light of the activities outlined in Section 2A.

2) PROGRESS

A) MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES TO IMPLEMENT THE 2022–2027 ACTION PLAN

Since the adoption of the 2022–2027 action plan in June 2022, components of the Movement have individually and jointly undertaken many of the activities set out in the 2022–2027 action plan in pursuit of the aims listed above. The following is a summary of these activities, rather than an exhaustive list.

Movement events

The ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) held a number of international events, sometimes in partnership with governments and other organizations. Events involving external participants generally focused on promoting adherence to the TPNW and on raising awareness of the humanitarian impact and risks of any use of nuclear weapons, while events for the Movement were aimed at building capacity, sharing information and resources, and coordinating implementation of the 2022–2027 action plan.

Meeting of National Societies in European and other states possessing or associated with nuclear weapons (Copenhagen, 9 November 2022)

The Norwegian Red Cross and the ICRC organized this meeting of 19 National Societies to take stock of the Movement's efforts to influence the policies of European states and other states possessing or associated with nuclear weapons, and to develop new joint initiatives to implement the 2022–2027 action plan.

African Regional Seminar on the Universalization of the TPNW (Pretoria, 30–31 January 2023)

Co-hosted by South Africa, the ICRC and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the seminar brought together representatives of 37 African States to discuss further progress towards the universalization of the TPNW in Africa.

Regional Conference on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia (Astana, 29 August 2023)

Co-organized by Kazakhstan, the ICRC, the Center for International Security and Policy, Soka Gakkai International and ICAN, participants included the five Member States of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone treaty,¹ as well as representatives of communities affected by nuclear testing. The meeting aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the humanitarian impact of the development, testing and use of nuclear weapons, and to encourage the attending States to join the TPNW.

NukeEXPO: Science Expo on Nuclear Weapons, Humanitarian Impacts and Risks (Brussels, 16 April / Oslo, 26 April 2024)

Co-organized by Norwegian People's Aid, the ICRC, the Belgian Red Cross and the Norwegian Red Cross, these two events combined expert panel discussions with an interactive exhibition in order to raise awareness of the current humanitarian response capacity in the event of a nuclear detonation, the global and long-term consequences, and the increasing risk of intentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons.² The events were aimed at European Union and national policymakers, emergency responders, academia, civil society and the media.

¹ Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

² Details and a report of the events are available at <https://www.nukeexpo.org/>

Meetings of the Movement Support Group

The Movement Support Group, which is mandated to support and guide implementation of the 2022–2027 action plan, met at approximately quarterly intervals (usually online; a hybrid meeting was held in New York during the second Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW in November 2023). The meetings provided an opportunity to share information and experience, and to coordinate joint activities. From 2024, each meeting of the group had a featured topic introduced by a guest speaker. Topics covered to date include gender and nuclear weapons, environmental impact, the TPNW Scientific Advisory Group, and nuclear deterrence.

Humanitarian diplomacy

The ICRC and many National Societies have actively pursued the 2022–2027 action plan's objectives in multilateral forums, in bilateral and regional meetings with States, and through letters and appeals.

Multilateral forums

The ICRC president addressed the 10th Review Conference of the NPT in August 2022, urging action to implement the disarmament obligations of the treaty in light of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the growing risk of their use. The ICRC also submitted a working paper with specific recommendations for the conference outcome. The ICRC made similar interventions at the 2023 NPT Preparatory Committee, and at the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly in October 2022 and 2023.

The Movement engaged actively in the second Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW (2MSP) in New York in November 2023, with representatives of eight National Societies³ participating, along with the ICRC and the IFRC. The ICRC participated actively in the preparatory process leading up to the meeting; Movement contributions during the meeting included a statement by the ICRC president;⁴ a joint ICRC–IFRC statement;⁵ ICRC participation as a panellist in a panel discussion held in plenary; interventions on universalization, positive obligations and national implementation; and presentations at several side events. Several National Societies also held bilateral meetings with their governments' delegations to the United Nations, facilitated by the ICRC.

Following the 2MSP, the ICRC has continued to participate actively in the TPNW intersessional process of working groups and consultations leading to the third Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW, to be held in March 2025. The ICRC has also promoted the TPNW and a humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament in bilateral and regional dialogues with States, including in regional conferences in Africa, South-East Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. For example, the ICRC facilitated a discussion on the TPNW at the Regional Meeting of the National Commissions for the Application of International Humanitarian Law (CONADIH) and Similar Organizations of America, held in Buenos Aires in 2023. In the lead up to the 2MSP, the ICRC reached out bilaterally to States to encourage participation and encourage the signature and ratification of the treaty.

³ National Societies of Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Tajikistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan and the United States. Participation of several National Societies was facilitated by funding provided by the Norwegian Red Cross.

⁴ "We are here with a common goal: to eliminate nuclear weapons", available at <https://www.icrc.org/en/tpnw-msp2-president-statement>

⁵ Joint statement by the ICRC and the IFRC, available at [https://docs-library.unoda.org/Treaty_on_the_Prohibition_of_Nuclear_Weapons_-_SecondMeeting_of_States_Parties_\(2023\)/ICRC.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Treaty_on_the_Prohibition_of_Nuclear_Weapons_-_SecondMeeting_of_States_Parties_(2023)/ICRC.pdf)

Joint activities

Ahead of the G7 summit in Hiroshima in May 2023, the presidents of the Japanese Red Cross Society and of the ICRC issued a joint statement⁶ urging all States to take immediate and decisive action to reduce the risks of nuclear catastrophe, including by joining the TPNW, condemning all nuclear threats and taking concrete steps to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons being used. In conjunction with this statement, 11 National Societies in states possessing or associated with nuclear weapons wrote to their governments in similar terms.⁷

In the lead-up to the United Nations General Assembly First Committee in October 2022, 18 National Societies⁸ in states possessing or associated with nuclear weapons signed a joint letter to their governments urging them to vote in favour of (or at least abstain on) the resolutions on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the TPNW.

Starting in January 2023, a number of National Societies in states possessing or associated with nuclear weapons participated in a coordinated survey of their governments' capacities to respond to the detonation of a nuclear weapon in their territory, with the aim of establishing a dialogue with national authorities on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. The survey exercise and resulting discussions continue in 2024.

National activities

National Societies engaged in a range of activities to encourage their governments to join the TPNW and/or to fully implement the NPT and other instruments, principally through various means of highlighting the humanitarian impact of any use of nuclear weapons and the consequent need for urgent and decisive action.

Activities reported by National Societies⁹ included private dialogues with ministries of foreign affairs and other relevant government agencies; private and open letters to national leaders; briefings and roundtables on multilateral meetings and diplomatic processes (including in partnership with civil society organizations); briefings for parliamentarians and input to parliamentary resolutions; discussion in national IHL committees; and participation in revision processes for government and military manuals and policy documents. Several National Societies in states possessing or associated with nuclear weapons participated in successful efforts to persuade their governments to attend TPNW meetings of States Parties as observers.

Information resources and support

The ICRC continued to develop information resources to support TPNW universalization and implementation, publishing a briefing note on victim assistance and environmental remediation obligations in the treaty¹⁰ (complementing the previously published briefing notes on prohibition of assistance and on safeguards). In addition, in the course of 2024, the ICRC will update its information notes on the effects of nuclear weapons on human health, humanitarian assistance in response to the use of nuclear weapons and the environmental effects of nuclear

⁶ "Avoiding catastrophe: we must act now to ensure nuclear weapons are never again used", available at <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/avoiding-catastrophe-we-must-act-now-ensure-nuclear-weapons-are-never-again-used>

⁷ National Societies in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Spain and the United States.

⁸ National Societies in Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, France, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain and Sweden.

⁹ National Societies in Belgium, Canada, France, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States, among others.

¹⁰ Available at

https://www.icrc.org/en/download/file/267925/victim_assistance_and_environmental_remediation_obligations_-_briefing_note_-_icrc.pdf

war. The ICRC prepared a range of model letters and talking points for use by the wider Movement in various 2022–2027 action plan activities, and worked with National Societies to develop materials for national use.

Communication and outreach

National activities

National Societies engaged in a wide range of communication and outreach activities aimed at raising public awareness of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and increasing knowledge of and support for the TPNW. Activities reported by National Societies included publication of media articles; National Society website articles and blogs; television and radio interviews; podcasts, slideshows and short videos; speeches at public events (including Hiroshima Day commemorations); film screenings;¹¹ participation in academic seminars and contributions to research; public demonstrations of CBRN response actions; participation in civil society conferences and other events; outreach exercises in collaboration with mayors and local government; and adding a nuclear weapons segment in public IHL training courses.

Social media

The ICRC and many National Societies made active use of social media to raise awareness of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and to amplify the reach and impact of other communication and outreach efforts. Short animated videos produced by the ICRC proved effective in attracting views and interaction when shared by the Movement in connection with significant dates and events.

Youth outreach

Several National Societies undertook activities specifically aimed at engaging young people, including seminars and presentations at schools, universities and youth camps; publication of youth magazines; and essay and art contests. In November 2023, the Japanese Red Cross Society and the American Red Cross, in cooperation with the ICRC delegation in Japan, held an online event “Nuclear Weapons: A Japanese and American Youth Perspective”, which drew more than 170 participants. The Japanese Red Cross, American Red Cross and the ICRC also included youth representatives on their delegations to the TPNW second Meeting of States Parties. The Norwegian Red Cross, together with Norwegian People’s Aid, organized an evening for their youth groups to talk with a hibakusha.

B) ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

The 2022–2027 action plan was adopted at a time of increasing tensions among nuclear-armed states and the growing risk of the use of nuclear weapons. Regrettably, these trends have continued, and risk eroding the decades-long taboo against the use of nuclear weapons. This risk is now at its highest since the darkest moments of the Cold War. Nuclear rhetoric has increased alarmingly, and nuclear deterrence theories are regaining vigour. The modernization of nuclear arsenals continues unabated, with the development of smaller nuclear weapons claimed to be more “usable” and intended for tactical military use in combination with conventional capabilities. Despite the commitments made at NPT Review Conferences, the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines and security policies is, rather than diminishing, actually growing. On the diplomatic front, the 2022 NPT Review Conference failed to adopt an outcome document, Russia withdrew its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and prospects for arms control agreements among nuclear-armed states are grim.

¹¹ The documentary film *The Vow from Hiroshima* (2020), written by Michie Takeuchi and directed by Susan Strickler, was shown by several National Societies.

In these difficult circumstances, raising global awareness of – and ensuring governments focus on – the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons has become even more crucial. It is therefore important to continue to encourage all States to deepen their dialogue in all relevant forums to promote greater common understanding and synergies to help progress towards achieving the shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The TPNW has assumed an ever more important role as both a focus for efforts to place humanitarian consequences at the centre of the debate on nuclear weapons, and as a functioning multilateral channel for non-nuclear-armed States to take practical action towards the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. The political declarations issued by the first and second Meetings of States Parties to the TPNW give voice to the States without nuclear weapons (which constitute a large majority of the international community) and provide both an unequivocal condemnation of nuclear threats and a clear counterpoint to the narratives supporting nuclear deterrence.

The focus of the 2022–2027 action plan has therefore proved to be correct. Despite the challenges, progress has been made. Since the adoption of the plan in June 2022, six States have signed the TPNW and five have ratified or acceded, bringing the number of States Parties to 70, with another 27 States having signed it. TPNW implementation is moving ahead, with active support from the Movement. The wide range of national and international activities carried out by the Movement have raised awareness of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons among governments, the media, civil society, young people and the general public.

3) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In extremely challenging circumstances, the 2022–2027 action plan has delivered modest but promising results. The approach and scope of the plan have proved to be effective, as have many of the activities undertaken by different components of the Movement. What is most needed now is to scale up the number and widen the geographic distribution of these activities, especially in Africa and Asia. Fully implementing the 2022–2027 action plan depends on the active engagement of components of the Movement in all regions, as well as on effective collaboration, coordination and cooperation.