On behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) I would like to thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to contribute to today’s important discussion.

As the world’s largest humanitarian network, the IFRC will be at the forefront of any humanitarian response following the use of nuclear weapons. In 2011 we expressed our deep concern about the incalculable human suffering that will result from any use of nuclear weapons. Understanding the scale of the expected humanitarian consequences, we have also shared our concern about the lack of an adequate humanitarian response capacity in most countries and at the international level. The IFRC, and our sister organization the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have appealed to all States to ensure that nuclear weapons are never again used and to conclude with urgency a legally binding agreement to prohibit their use and lead to their complete elimination, based on their commitments and international obligations.

Last month, during the meeting of G7 foreign ministers in Hiroshima, the participants of the meeting paid a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, where they saw with their own eyes the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

Today, here in Geneva, the Red Cross Red Crescent call again on States to fulfill the commitments contained in Article 6 of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). In our view, as already urged by the Presidents of the IFRC and the ICRC, this could be achieved through the establishment of a time-bound framework to negotiate a legally-binding agreement. Such an agreement will enhance the outcomes of previous diplomatic efforts to rein in nuclear risks.
Significantly, some 159 States have agreed that the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear detonations make it imperative that these weapons should never be used again under any circumstances, and that all possible efforts be made to eliminate them. Disappointingly, the 2015 NPT Review Conference failed to reach a consensus agreement on advancing nuclear disarmament despite previous commitments. It is nonetheless encouraging that a United Nations General Assembly resolution on nuclear weapons supported by 139 countries has since then recognized the need to fill the legal gap. At the same time, the Action Plan agreed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference remains valid and provides a roadmap for progressing disarmament activity.

It is profoundly disturbing that the risk of nuclear weapon use through accident, escalation or intent appears to have increased in recent years. The organization Global Zero has documented “military incidents” since February 2014 involving nuclear weapon States and those allied to such States in Europe, North America, South Asia and East Asia and these incidents are now approaching levels not seen in Europe since the Cold War period. The risk of a nuclear catastrophe is estimated by former US Secretary of Defense William Perry to be “greater than it was during the Cold War and rising”. Additionally, there are heightened concerns on the possible use of a “dirty bomb” by non-State actors or increasing access to components that could lead to the building of a nuclear device. These concerns should inform and motivate urgent action by every State.

The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, and the risks associated with current trends, are too serious to ignore. A legally-binding agreement to prohibit the use of and to eliminate nuclear weapons will be an important step forward to help ensure that they will never be used again. We are encouraged that the mandate of this working group includes the identification of concrete legal measures that are needed to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. We urge the Working Group to adopt clear and practical recommendations towards this humanitarian imperative.

Until the last nuclear weapon is eliminated it is therefore extremely important that States take all necessary measures to diminish the very real risks of intentional or accidental nuclear detonations. It is encouraging that this Working Group is also mandated to recommend measures that reduce and eliminate such risks. In this regard we urge the Working Group to call on States that possess nuclear weapons and their allies to take or to continue to take concrete steps to reduce the role and significance of nuclear weapons in their military plans, doctrines and policies. We also ask nuclear-armed States, where appropriate, to reduce the number of warheads on high alert and to be more transparent about action taken to prevent accidental detonations. Many of these steps derive from long-standing political commitments and multilateral action plans which must be implemented urgently.
We all stand here today - the IFRC, the ICRC, civil society, and States - all aware of the risks associated with nuclear weapons, but also with the opportunity, mandate, and capacity to make significant progress towards a world safe from the destruction and incalculable suffering of a nuclear detonation. Now is the time for commitment and courage. In the name of humanity, we call upon States to stand fast, to fulfill the commitments they have already made, and to expand those commitments to include time bound progress towards the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons and towards their eventual and complete elimination.

Thank you.