Thank you Mr. Chairman

I would like to begin by thanking the speakers for their presentations and, in particular, Setsuko Thurlow for her moving testimony of what she saw and experienced during the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Her testimony and the other presentations in large part reflect what the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Japanese Red Cross Society witnessed and learned from being on the ground in Hiroshima in 1945 in the aftermath of the atomic detonation over that city.

This testimony and the discussions that we have had this morning are further confirmation that:

- Nuclear weapons are unique in their destructive power and in the scale of human suffering they cause. Their use, even on a limited scale, would have catastrophic and long-lasting consequences for human health, the environment, the climate, food production and socioeconomic development.

- The health impacts of nuclear weapons can last for decades and impact the children of survivors through genetic damage to their parents. This has been evident where nuclear weapons have been both used and tested. The ICRC could not have imagined that Japanese Red Cross hospitals would still be treating victims of cancer and leukemia attributable to radiation from the atomic blasts – today, 70 years later.

- The humanitarian consequences of a nuclear-weapon detonation would not be limited to the country where it occurs but would impact other countries and their populations. Thus, the continued existence of nuclear weapons and the risk of their intentional or accidental use is and must be a global concern.

As many of you know in 2007 and 2009 the ICRC, conducted its own studies into its own capacity and that of the international community to provide effective assistance to the victims in the aftermath of a nuclear detonation. Our conclusion at that time was that “there is no effective or feasible means of assisting a substantial portion of survivors in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear detonation, while adequately protecting those delivering assistance, in most countries or at the international level. Nothing we have learned since then has changed our view or our position.

Nevertheless, in many contexts National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and their International Federation, are active in disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction, including in some countries the risk of nuclear weapon detonations. We would urge States to consult with their respective National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies to discuss reducing nuclear weapons risk and the corresponding challenges that would arise at the local, national and sub-regional levels.
Turning now to the guiding questions that are outlined in the working paper prepared for this session, the ICRC agrees that there is a need to sensitize the general public, in particular to raise awareness of the current risks of nuclear detonation and the severe, widespread and long lasting consequences that any detonation of a nuclear weapon would entail.

To help accomplish this, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement adopted a 4-year plan of action in 2013 which is intended to help National Red Cross Societies engage on this issue in their national contexts. It outlines a range of specific actions that National Societies may undertake to further understanding of this issue among the general public, parliamentarians and others. I would highlight that many of the points in the action plan correspond to or dovetail nicely with the recommendations outlined in Annex IV of your synthesis paper, Mr. Chairman. I would also highlight that just the past weekend the ICRC and the International Federation hosted a NS workshop on nuclear weapons to discuss the current state of the nuclear disarmament debate and review the current status of the Movement’s 4 year action plan. Some 20 National Societies attended the event and a number of them are represented here this week at the OEWG.

In closing, the ICRC would just highlight that sensitizing the public to the consequences of nuclear weapons is important but it not a goal in and of itself. It is a tool to inspire action and support the taking of urgent measures. But it should not delay action nor should it in any way be viewed as a prerequisite for advancing the nuclear disarmament debate. The obligation to pursue nuclear disarmament already exists and these obligations should be implemented as a matter of urgency even while improving general awareness of the problem is ongoing.

Thank you.