The NPT review conference in 2010 referred explicitly to the catastrophic consequences any use of nuclear weapons would have. This was an important message from the world community. Since 2010, we have seen the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons increasingly being recognized as a fundamental, and global, concern that must be at the core of all our deliberations regarding nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

In March this year the Government of Norway hosted an international conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. The aim of the Conference was to provide an arena for the international community to have a facts-based discussion of the humanitarian and developmental consequences that would result from a nuclear weapon detonation. The Conference focused on what actually happens on the ground after a nuclear detonation. The consequences of a nuclear detonation are relevant to practitioners in such diverse fields as health services, development, environment, finance, and emergency preparedness. So far there had been no global arena in which to begin to discuss these issues. That is why Norway decided to organize the Conference, and to invite a wide-range of stakeholders. All interested states, as well as UN humanitarian organizations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, representatives of civil society and other relevant actors were invited to the Conference.

The Conference was held over two days and included presentations by international experts and relevant national and international stakeholders concerning three key aspects:

1. The immediate humanitarian impact of nuclear detonations
2. The wider and more long term developmental, health and environmental consequences

3. Preparedness, including plans and existing capacity to respond to this type of disaster

128 states met at the Conference, together with UN organisations, the ICRC, IFRC and civil society. The Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs hosted the Conference. The High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Director of OCHA in Geneva, the Secretary General of the Norwegian People’s Aid and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) addressed the Conference’s opening session. All presentations are available on the Conference website and a DVD will be made available shortly.

The broad and active participation at the Oslo Conference reflects the recognition that the catastrophic effect of a nuclear detonation is an issue of concern and relevance to all.

The main conclusion from the conference is that no state or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation in any meaningful way. No existing national or international emergency system would be able to provide adequate assistance to the victims.

The use and testing of nuclear weapons in the past has demonstrated not only their devastating immediate effects, but also the serious long-term effects. The effects of a nuclear weapon detonation will not be constrained by national borders, and will affect states and people in significant ways, regionally as well as globally. [Nuclear detonations affect future generations’ health, food security and vital natural resources and hamper socioeconomic development. While political circumstances
have changed much in recent years, the destructive potential of nuclear weapons remains with us.]

The possibility of a nuclear weapon’s detonation, intended or not intended, represents a significant threat to humanity. We must continue to actively address this threat, and to place the humanitarian impact at the core of our efforts.

We believe that there is a new sense of urgency that will govern our work in this area. We have also recently been reminded in very sharp terms that the use of these weapons is considered to be a realistic option. We cannot approach nuclear weapons through a strategy of denial. As long as the probability of a nuclear weapons detonation exists, the consequences of such an event means it must be a humanitarian concern. While the overall number of nuclear weapons in the world has decreased since the end of the Cold War, tens of thousands of nuclear weapons remain in the arsenals of states. Meanwhile, the number of states with access to these arms has increased. This means that, combined with continued documented nuclear weapons accidents and the ever-present risk of nuclear theft or diversion, the dangers must be addressed.

The devastating effects of nuclear detonations have been well documented through experience from the field. These realities must guide our efforts if we are to achieve meaningful progress. We welcome Mexico’s offer to host a Conference to further discuss these issues. We are looking forward to continue to broaden the discussions on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. This is an issue that affects us all.