Madam President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this United Nations Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination.

The prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons is a humanitarian imperative.

The International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement know this all too well. In 1945, we witnessed first-hand the horrific effects of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as we attempted to bring relief to the dying and injured. Seventy-two years on, we bear witness to the long-term effects of nuclear weapons, as Japanese Red Cross hospitals continue to treat many thousands of victims of cancers caused by radiation exposure. Evidence of the indiscriminate effects and unspeakable suffering caused by nuclear weapons raise significant doubts about their compatibility with international humanitarian law. And today, a large majority of States recognize that the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons must drive efforts towards nuclear disarmament, including those undertaken by this Conference.

The historic significance of this Conference cannot be overstated. More than seven decades after calls for the elimination of nuclear weapons were first made, States are finally meeting at global level to prohibit these weapons under international law.

Of course, adopting a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons will not make them immediately disappear. But it will reinforce the stigma against their use, support commitments to nuclear
risk reduction, and be a disincentive for proliferation. It will be a concrete step towards fulfilling existing commitments for nuclear disarmament, notably those of Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. As with chemical and biological weapons, a clear and unambiguous prohibition is the cornerstone of their elimination.

Madam President, Distinguished Delegates,

Nuclear weapons are the most terrifying weapon ever invented. They are unique in their destructive power, in the unspeakable human suffering they cause, and in the impossibility of controlling their effects in space and time. They threaten irreversible harm to the environment and to future generations. Indeed, they threaten the very survival of humanity.

So it is in the name of humanity that I appeal to delegates at this Conference to work with urgency and determination, to adopt a clear and unambiguous prohibition of nuclear weapons, grounded in international humanitarian law. In doing so, you will take an essential and historic step towards bringing the era of nuclear weapons to an end.

Thank you.