



VIENNA CONFERENCE ON
**THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT
OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**
8-9 DEC. 2014

Isodarco 2015

The Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian
Consequences of Nuclear Weapons and Next
Steps

www.HINW14vienna.at

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Origins of Humanitarian Initiative

- Prevention of humanitarian consequences is the *raison d'être* of disarmament and non-proliferation regime (Preambles NPT, PTBT, CTBT, CWC, BTWC...)
- 2009 Prague Speech
- 2010: ICRC and NPT Review Conference
- 2012-2014 cross-regional statements (from 16 to 155 supporting States)
- 3/2013 Oslo Conference
- 2/2014 Nayarit Conference
- 12/2014 Vienna Conference

Why this focus now?

- credibility deficit of disarmament process
- threatens the fabric of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime
- unless turn around is achieved – proliferation is inevitable and nuclear dangers and risks become even greater
- counter the traditional security policy focussed nuclear weapons discourse with focus on consequences, risks, legality and morality
- aims to reinforce the taboo against nuclear weapons
- rather than essential for collective security, nuclear weapons become understood as a dangerous liability of collective insecurity

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- 158 States participating
- broad UN System representation
- Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- Academia
- Civil Society (600 activists at NGO Forum)

- Messages by UN-SG, Pope Francis
- Victims (Hibakusha and testing victims)

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- Discussion of Initiative in NWS (as well as EU) primarily from process angle „where will it lead to?“
- Focus should instead be on the substance of humanitarian arguments.
- facts and findings on consequences of nuclear weapons, associated risks, legality and morality.
- „irrefutable conclusions“ challenge the prevailing discourse on nuclear weapons utility and the logic and legitimacy of nuclear deterrence approach
- these require urgent policy considerations

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- outcome of Vienna:
- 8 key conclusions that build upon Oslo and Nayarit conferences.
- input for policy debate at NPT Review Conference and beyond

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Conclusion 1:

- The impact of a nuclear weapon detonation, irrespective of the cause, would not be constrained by national borders and could have regional and even global consequences, causing destruction, death and displacement as well as profound and long-term damage to the environment, climate, human health and well-being, socioeconomic development, social order and could even threaten the survival of humankind.

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Conclusion 2:

- The scope, scale and interrelationship of the humanitarian consequences caused by nuclear weapon detonations are catastrophic and more complex than commonly understood. These consequences can be large scale and potentially irreversible.

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Conclusion 3:

- The use and testing of nuclear weapons have demonstrated their devastating immediate, mid- and long-term effects. Nuclear testing in several parts of the world has left a legacy of serious health and environmental consequences. Radioactive contamination from these tests disproportionately affects women and children. It contaminated food supplies and continues to be measurable in the atmosphere to this day.

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Conclusion 4:

- As long as nuclear weapons exist, there remains the possibility of a nuclear weapon explosion. Even if the probability is considered low, given the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation, the risk is unacceptable. The risks of accidental, mistaken, unauthorized or intentional use of nuclear weapons are evident due to the vulnerability of nuclear command and control networks to human error and cyber-attacks, the maintaining of nuclear arsenals on high levels of alert, forward deployment and their modernization. These risks increase over time. The dangers of access to nuclear weapons and related materials by non-state actors, particularly terrorist groups, persists.

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Conclusion 5:

- There are many circumstances in which nuclear weapons could be used in view of international conflicts and tensions, and against the background of the current security doctrines of States possessing nuclear weapons. As nuclear deterrence entails preparing for nuclear war, the risk of nuclear weapon use is real. Opportunities to reduce risk must be taken now, such as de-alerting and reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines. Limiting the role of nuclear weapons to deterrence does not remove the possibility of their use. Nor does it address the risks stemming from accidental use. The only assurance against the risk of a nuclear weapon detonation is the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

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Conclusion 6:

- No state or international body could address in an adequate manner the immediate humanitarian emergency or long-term consequences caused by a nuclear weapon detonation in a populated area, nor provide adequate assistance to those affected. Such capacity is unlikely ever to exist. Coordinated preparedness may nevertheless be useful in mitigating the effects including of a terrorist event involving the explosion of an improvised nuclear device. The imperative of prevention as the only guarantee against the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use was highlighted.

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Conclusion 7:

- Looking at nuclear weapons from a number of different legal angles, it is clear that there is no comprehensive legal norm universally prohibiting possession, transfer, production and use. International environmental law remains applicable in armed conflict and can pertain to nuclear weapons, although it does not specifically regulate these arms. Likewise, international health regulations would cover effects of nuclear weapons. The new evidence that has emerged in the last two years about the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons casts further doubt on whether these weapons could ever be used in conformity with IHL. As was the case with torture, which defeats humanity and is now unacceptable to all, the suffering caused by nuclear weapons use is not only a legal matter, it necessitates moral appraisal.

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Conclusion 8:

- The catastrophic consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation event and the risks associated with the mere existence of these weapons raise profound ethical and moral questions on a level transcending legal discussions and interpretations.

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Austrian Pledge

- (...) to present the facts-based discussions, findings and compelling evidence of the Vienna Conference (...) to all relevant fora, in particular the NPT Review Conference 2015 and in the UN framework, as they should be at the centre of all deliberations, obligations and commitments with regard to nuclear disarmament,
- (...) calls on all states parties to the NPT to (...) identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons (...),
- (...) pledges to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders (...) in efforts to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks.

Next steps?

- still broad range of views on pathway
- humanitarian initiative underscores urgency and gives key arguments:
 - broad range of consequences are greater and more complex – a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought.
 - risks are far more considerable – be afraid of your own nuclear weapons and mindful of Murphy's Law
 - in any realistic scenario, nuclear weapons could not be used lawfully
 - moral case for nuclear deterrence has disappeared
 - In the absence of further progress toward complete disarmament (...), the nuclear weapon establishment has lost much of its legitimacy.
 - Since what is intended is mass destruction—with extensive and lasting collateral damage, inhumane suffering, and the risk of escalation—the system of nuclear deterrence can no longer be deemed a policy that stands firmly on moral ground.

Next steps?

- NPT Review Conference – expectation of urgent answers to address these conclusions
- decide on concrete and credible measures to address these concerns
- decide on „effective measures“ (NAC paper)
- „last chance“ (?) of the NPT to be seen as credible framework to pursue and achieve nuclear disarmament
- should be uniting issue – move collectively, if possible



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