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Mexico conference marks turning point towards nuclear weapon ban

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Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit, Mexico, 13 Feb. 2014 - The Second International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, concluded today with a call from the Mexican hosts for states to launch a diplomatic process to ban nuclear weapons. Over 140 governments participated from all regions of the world.

With a large group of countries calling for a treaty to ban nuclear weapons the meeting marked a turning point in the process to outlaw and eliminate these weapons of mass destruction. Austria announced that it would host the next meeting in Vienna later this year.

"The evidence is clear. The impact would be horrific and we could not respond. The risk of a detonation is significant. That is why we have heard growing support this week for a ban," said Liv Tørres, Secretary General of Norwegian People's Aid. "We expect states to commit to negotiations at the next meeting in Vienna."

In his closing summary, the Chair called for the development of new international standards on nuclear weapons, including a legally binding instrument. The time has come, he noted, for a diplomatic process to reach this goal, within a specified timeframe, identifying the most appropriate forum and on the basis of a clear and substantive framework. Calling for this process to conclude by the 70th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Chair described Nayarit as "the point of no return".

The meeting in Nayarit saw presentations from UN agencies, renowned academics, former military officers and the UK's Chatham House on the likely impact of a nuclear weapon detonation on the planet's climate, agriculture, human health and social and economic infrastructure. Yet whilst other weapons of mass destruction - chemical and biological - have already been clearly declared illegal, the same is not true for nuclear weapons. In response to the evidence presented on humanitarian impact, many states recognized the need to put in place a ban as the next step towards elimination.

"A ban on nuclear weapons is long overdue and the conferences in Oslo and here in Mexico have created an opportunity for us to put it in place," said Ray Acheson of WILPF. "States must take this opportunity when they meet in Vienna. Civil society is already mobilizing to make that happen."

The Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace participated in the conference as a civil society partner from India. The Indian government also officially participated and delivered a statement on the second day of the conference acknowledging the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. The CNDP welcomes the government's participation and urges it to actively support the process and join the global call for a ban on nuclear weapons. The response this conference has received worldwide is a testimony to the fact that abolishing nuclear weapons remains a deeply popular aspiration and the world must progress faster towards this goal. Austria has already announced that it will host the next such conference.

The Mexico conference is the latest step in a process that has changed the way nuclear weapons are discussed at the international level. Since 2010, when states parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty recognized "the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons," a new narrative has emerged in which the actual effects of these weapons are the basis for renewed actions to address them. The Red Cross movement, United Nations relief agencies, civil society and the majority of the world's nations have endorsed this humanitarian initiative. In October 125 states joined a statement by New Zealand at the United Nations noting that "the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches and efforts towards nuclear disarmament."

Several atomic bomb survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki ("Hibakusha") presented their testimonies at the conference. US climate scientist Professor Alan Robock, physician Dr. Ira Helfand, and Richard Moyes of Article 36

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presented recent research on the effects of nuclear detonations on the planet's climate, agriculture, human health and social and economic infrastructure. Renowned author of "Command and Control" Eric Schlosser, former US military officer Bruce Blair, and Chatham House Research Director Dr. Patricia Lewis addressed nuclear weapons risks, miscalculations and accidents.

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