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delivered by
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Since the late 1990s, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), whose mission is to protect and assist victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence, has highlighted the high human cost of the unregulated availability of weapons. We strongly support the adoption of a comprehensive and effective Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) next year. A very large proportion of the death, injury and pure cruelty inflicted upon civilians each year occurs because weapons are simply too easily available, including to those who will use them to violate international humanitarian law. An effective Arms Trade Treaty would not only protect individual lives and livelihoods but it would also reduce the social and economic disruption that accompanies armed insecurity in large parts of the world and have important health benefits for entire populations.

The ICRC in August 2011 launched a four-year initiative on the theme of "Health Care in Danger". This initiative is based directly on the ICRC's field experience and a sixteen-country study of attacks on health care in contexts in which we work. The study recorded 655 incidents over two and a half years involving attacks on health workers, health facilities and medical transports. In these incidents 1834 people were killed or injured while giving or receiving health care. The effect of these attacks and of armed violence in other contexts covered in the study was the denial of health care to thousands upon thousands of people in places where human health and health care systems are already precarious. The broader implications of «armed insecurity» on the health of civilian populations, which the study highlights, include the denial of 150,000 medical consultations per year in one of the poorest countries on earth, the denial of polio vaccines to several hundred thousand children in another context and tens of thousands of deaths per month in yet another. These health-related impacts are just a small window into the horrendous human cost of easy access to weapons that a future Arms Trade Treaty must contribute to preventing.

We urge all States here today to commit themselves to working intensely over the coming year to help ensure that next July's Diplomatic Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty is successful. In our view, a comprehensive and effective Treaty will require careful scrutiny of all transfers of all conventional arms and their ammunition so as to prevent weapons from falling too easily into the hands of those who can be expected to use them to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law. We commend the elements set out in the Chairman's Draft Paper. It provides a solid basis for moving towards the type of treaty that is so desperately needed by individuals, families and communities in vast areas of the world where weapons are sometimes easier to obtain than food, health care or medicines.

Since last year's review conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons there has been little reported progress in the fulfillment of the Review Conference's many urgent commitments to reducing the role of nuclear weapons, further reducing their numbers and preventing their use. It is of crucial importance that the commitments undertaken at the Review Conference be fulfilled as a humanitarian, moral and political imperative. It is also important to build on the recognition in the Final Document of the "catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons" and of the relevance of international humanitarian law in this regard. Far more needs to be done to inform policy makers, the media and public of the catastrophic human costs of these weapons, of the imperative that they are never again used and of the urgent need for a legally binding international instrument that will prohibit their use and lead to their elimination. The ICRC, for its
part, has worked throughout the past year to increase understanding of these realities within the worldwide International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. We will support increased work on this issue by National Societies in the future.

One of the landmark advances in international humanitarian law in recent years was the adoption in 2008 and entry into force in 2010 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. After decades in which the inaccuracy and unreliability of these area weapons plagued the communities and countries in which they were used, the international community has realized that the human cost of such weapons is simply unacceptable. The recent Meeting of States Parties to this Convention in Beirut was an impressive demonstration of the effectiveness of the Convention in stimulating progress in clearance and stockpile destruction, attracting new States parties and mobilizing resources to assist the victims of these weapons and their communities.

The ICRC appreciates that a number of States that are not yet able to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions now recognize the humanitarian impacts of these weapons and are ready to take some steps to reduce these impacts. These States should take whatever actions they deem feasible at national level. However, in the field of international humanitarian law we would consider it regrettable if new norms were adopted that would contradict rather than complement the Convention on Cluster Munitions and would allow the development and use of specific types of cluster munitions that are likely to perpetuate the humanitarian problem. It would be the first time that States would have adopted weaker protections for civilians in an international humanitarian law treaty than those contained in a treaty already in force. We urge all States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), and especially those also party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, to carefully consider their responsibilities in this field as they prepare for the November CCW Review Conference.

In January of 2011, the UN General Assembly in resolution 65/41 endorsed the report of the Group of Governmental Experts in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security. Among the Group’s findings was that “there is increased reporting that States are developing information and communication technologies as instruments of warfare and intelligence”. In this respect, the ICRC draws the attention of States to the potential humanitarian consequences of cyber warfare, that is the resort to computer network attacks during armed conflict situations. Such consequences may include disastrous scenarios such as air traffic control systems being interfered with and causing airplanes to collide or crash, disruption of the electricity or water supplies for the civilian population, or damage to chemical or nuclear facilities. The ICRC therefore recalls the obligation of all parties to conflicts to respect the rules of international humanitarian law if they resort to means and methods of cyber warfare, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.