IPPNW address to negotiating conference for a nuclear weapons prohibition treaty, Topic 1

UN New York 29 March 2017, A/Prof Tilman Ruff AM

These negotiations grew out the humanitarian initiative, advanced by ICRC president Kellenberger’s 2010 call to the Geneva diplomatic corps, and the subsequent recognition of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons in the consensus outcome document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

We have been delighted to hear so many interventions refer to the substantive conclusions of the landmark evidence-based humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons conferences in Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna.

The key basis for these negotiations is the utterly catastrophic devastation that would inevitably be caused by any use of nuclear weapons; and while they exist, the alarming and growing daily risk of their use. The detonation of nuclear weapons produces incinerating heat, powerful shock waves and overpressures, ionising radiation, and massive amounts of smoke and soot that can alter the Earth’s climate, decimating agriculture and risking starvation for billions of people around the world.

We think this should be prominent in the treaty preamble.

An understanding of what nuclear weapons do invalidates all arguments for continued possession of these weapons and requires that they urgently be prohibited and eliminated as the only course of action commensurate with the existential danger they pose.

The largest global federations of doctors, nurses and public health professionals are united in this assessment, circulated as a joint working paper to this conference.

We believe that survivors of nuclear weapons impacts, civil society and international organisations and experts should participate in every forum discussing nuclear weapons, before and after the conclusion of a ban treaty. We greatly welcome the productive collaborative partnerships with governments in this conference.

We commend reference to human rights in the preamble. While human rights are usually considered as non-hierarchical and indivisible, the right to life is, in reality, a pre-condition for the enjoyment of all other rights.

We commend recognition of our collective responsibility to protect the life and health of future generations in a healthy biosphere; and protecting the most vulnerable – particularly women and girls, and children, who are at greatest risk of harm from exposure to ionising radiation.
The imperative of nuclear eradication to secure planetary health is not optional or negotiable – it is the precondition for the survival and continuation of human civilisation and the bounty of life on earth.

Finally, we urge that the treaty be fully comprehensive in its prohibitions. We may not have a second chance.

I thank you.