



Nuclear Disarmament: Seeking Human Security

6 July 2017



For many, the horror of a potential nuclear war receded from consciousness with the end of the Cold War, but recent geopolitical developments remind us that our world remains in grave danger. Even a limited nuclear exchange would have devastating consequences for people and the planet. Tragically, human error or miscalculation could lead to a humanitarian catastrophe. Moreover, our world has become increasingly multipolar with a variety of threats reaching from terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, cybersecurity to environmental degradation and poverty, which raises doubts about the adequacy of nuclear deterrence as an effective response to these challenges.

Nuclear disarmament is now on the world's agenda. From 15 June to 7 July, the United Nations is hosting a conference *"to negotiate a legally binding treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination."* The fact that most of the world's nations are participating in this effort testifies to the urgency of their concern, an urgency intensified by the prospect of nuclear terrorism and proliferation, and to the inequality and dissatisfaction of non-nuclear states about the lack of progress in nuclear disarmament efforts.

The United States and most European nations are not joining these negotiations. Instead of focusing on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons, their attention is on the need for a broader security architecture to allow for strategic stability as verifiable reductions are achieved.

Nuclear states are making significant new investments to modernize nuclear arsenals. These costly programs will divert enormous resources from other pressing needs that build security, including achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. As Pope Francis has argued powerfully: *"Spending on nuclear weapons squanders the wealth of nations. To prioritize such spending is a mistake and a misallocation of resources which would be far better invested in the areas of integral human development, education, health and the fight against extreme poverty"* (7 December 2014).

Security is a basic prerequisite for human flourishing. The Church's own teaching affirms that *"the common good requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order"* (Catechism, #1909). A key moral question is: Do nuclear weapons foster security and contribute to genuine peace?

Pope Francis in his message to the UN Conference on nuclear weapons ban treaty negotiations in March 2017 used direct language in answering this question: *"International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power. Peace must be built on justice, on integral human development, on respect for fundamental human rights, on the protection of creation, on the participation of all in public life, on trust between peoples, on the support of peaceful institutions, on access to education and health, on dialogue and solidarity. From this*

perspective, we need to go beyond nuclear deterrence: the international community is called upon to adopt forward-looking strategies to promote the goal of peace and stability and to avoid short-sighted approaches to the problems surrounding national and international security.”

Moreover, in his January 2017 address to the Diplomatic Corps, Pope Francis recalled the longstanding support of the Catholic Church for a ban on nuclear weapons: “*The words of Saint John XXIII in Pacem in Terris continue to ring true: ‘... Nuclear weapons must be banned.’*” The Holy See continues to be an insistent voice of moral reason in support of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation.

As pastors and moral teachers, it is beyond our competence to chart out the exact path to a world without nuclear weapons, but we can point with some certainty to decades of frustration with the pace and scope of nuclear disarmament. This frustration has undoubtedly contributed to the effort of many nations to engage in negotiating a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons.

The indiscriminate and disproportionate nature of nuclear weapons, compel the world to move beyond nuclear deterrence. We call upon the United States and European nations to work with other nations to map out a credible, verifiable and enforceable strategy for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This goal is achievable if all nations, nuclear and non-nuclear alike, work together. We are aware that the path towards a world without nuclear weapons is complex and long, but we think that, in particular, the following steps could make a significant contribution to achieving this goal:

- to carry further the nonproliferation and disarmament obligations in line with the international legal framework;
- to reinforce safeguard and control mechanisms at the military, diplomatic and political levels;
- to develop and implement with determination measures deepening mutual trust at all levels;
- to reduce reliance on nuclear deterrence in national and international security strategies in favor of more effective alternatives focusing on human security and peace; and
- to engage in a global debate in relevant international fora, so as to work for creating and promoting the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.

We share the hope of our Holy Father, Pope Francis: “*Nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence among peoples and states. The youth of today and tomorrow deserve far more. They deserve a peaceful world order based on the unity of the human family, grounded on respect, cooperation, solidarity and compassion. Now is the time to counter the logic of fear with the ethic of responsibility, and so foster a climate of trust and sincere dialogue*” (7 December 2014).

Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich, President
Conference of European Justice and Peace
Commissions (Justice & Peace Europe)

Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chairman
Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops