

Vatican Statement on Nuclear Weapons

On October 29, 1997, the Vatican's newspaper "L'Osservatore Romano" published the following statement given by Archbishop Renato Martino, the Holy See's Permanent Observer at the United Nations on October 15, 1997

As the world approaches the millennium, many people and organizations are already casting their vision towards the opening years of the 21st century. Will the next century be a time of peace, the fruit of the blossoming of human intelligence and human love? Or will the world sink once again into the morass of wars as we have witnessed in the death-filled 20th century? The essential questions of war and peace preoccupy humanity and deserve the utmost introspection of this committee.

We can draw a measure of hope that peace will be our accomplishment in the years ahead because of the achievements of the past few years: the ending of the Cold War, reductions of military forces in Europe, the Chemical Weapons Treaty, reductions of nuclear weapons by the two foremost nuclear weapons States, the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the adoption of the convention on anti-personnel land-mines. These achievements are steps that have moved the world closer to peace and the First Committee has played a role in this success.

But can we say that the course to peace in its entirety is clear? Unfortunately, we cannot. Every day conflict and violence still produce victims. Genocide, the slaughter of innocents, and attacks on vulnerable populations continue to scar the landscape. The arms trade, particularly of conventional weapons, only adds to the bloodshed in many warring countries. Indeed, in recent conflicts, more people are killed by short-range weapons than by weapons of mass destruction. The tragedy of this trend is that more human beings, including children, are forced to wage war. In addition, these wars are often prolonged by short-ranged weapons. Most developing countries where conflict situations exist are abundantly supplied with such weapons. In spite of this fact, weapons of mass destruction are still produced in great quantity. Nuclear weapons, aptly described as "the ultimate evil" are still possessed by the most powerful States which refuse to let them go.

We Cannot Simultaneously Pay for War and Peace

These searing facts of militarism remind us of how far the world still has to go to claim a universal peace. The world is paying a high price for the "culture of war" that has characterized the 20th century. Even now, nearly a decade after the end of the Cold War, the world's governments spend more than \$800 billion a year to sport military forces of more than 27 million soldiers. While this is a decline in spending since the Cold War high in 1987, most of the decline has come from the sharp drop in spending by the former Warsaw Pact countries. Despite the end of the Cold War, developed nations, other than the East European countries, spend only 10% less than they did in 1987. Military expenditures of the NATO countries are now more than 10 times the expenditures of the former Warsaw Pact countries. Not only are the developed countries big military spenders, they are also responsible for 90% of the \$22 billion annual arms trade. The dangerous global proliferation of arms and weapons technology has contributed to inciting and prolonging armed conflicts raging in different locations around the world.

For their part, the developing countries currently spend \$221 billion on armed forces. This spending is a considerable drain on these nations' already limited resources: new weapons procurement and larger armies mean less funds to invest in health, education, economic development and other urgent social needs of large and vulnerable populations. Some 1.3 billion people are so poor that they cannot meet their basic needs for food and shelter. Sixty per cent of humanity lives on less than \$2 a day. Despite some remarkable success in human development in some fast-growing economies, more than 100 countries are worse off today than they were 15 years ago. Each year between 13 and 18 million people, most of them children, die from hunger and poverty-related causes.

Sustainable development needs huge amounts of investment in scientific research, technological development, education and training, infrastructure development and the transfer of technology. Investment in these structural advances is urgently needed to stop carbon dioxide poisoning of the atmosphere and the depletion of the earth's biological resources such as the forests, wetlands and animal species now under attack. But the goals for sustainable development set out in the 1992 Earth Summit's major document Agenda 21, are blocked by political inertia, which countenances continued high military spending.

It is clear, as the Director-General of UNESCO put it, that "we cannot simultaneously pay the price of war and the price of peace". Budgetary priorities need to be realigned in order to direct financial resources to enhancing life, not producing death. A transformation of political attitudes is needed to build a "culture of peace". A new political attitude would say no to investment in arms and destruction and yes to investment in the construction of peace. The relationship between disarmament and development, given short shrift by governments since the international conference of 1987, must be emphasized anew. In that relationship, a process of disarmament, providing security and progressively lower levels of armaments, could allow more resources to be devoted to development; correspondingly, the development process enhances security and can promote disarmament.

Nuclear Arms are Incompatible with the Peace We Seek

Such an approach to human security by governments would lead to the fulfillment of the right to peace, which every person in every culture can claim. No lesser goal than the right to live in peace will suffice for the new millennium.

The international community, when awakened, has shown that it can indeed move to strengthen human security. The work fostered by the Ottawa Process in producing a treaty banning the production, export and use of anti-personnel land-mines reflects the strengths of compassion and political action. The Holy See commends this initiative and urges universal support for the treaty. Pope John Paul II has appealed for the "definitive cessation" of the manufacture and use of such "insidious arms" which strike cruelly and indiscriminately at civilian populations. Signing the new treaty will not be enough, however. Equal attention should be given to the detection and removal of the 100 million deployed land-mines that continue to kill and maim 28,000 innocents every year. More resources should be devoted to demining efforts.

If biological weapons, chemical weapons and now land-mines can be done away with, so too can nuclear weapons. No weapon so threatens the longed-for peace of the 21st century as the nuclear. Let not the immensity of this task dissuade us from the efforts needed to free humanity from such a scourge. With the valuable admonition offered in the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, the international community can see how the legal and moral arguments against nuclear weapons intertwine with the strategic: since nuclear weapons can destroy all life on the planet, they imperil all that humanity has ever stood for and indeed humanity itself. During the acrimonious years of the Cold War with the emphasis on the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence as a constant justification for the nuclear arms build-up the international community felt powerless to stop the relentless build-up of nuclear weapons. But now, in the post-Cold War era characterized by new partnerships, the international community cannot shield itself from the assault on life itself that nuclear weapons represent.

The work that this Committee has done in calling for negotiations leading to a Nuclear Weapons Convention must be increased. Those nuclear weapons States resisting such negotiations must be challenged, for, in clinging to their outmoded rationales for nuclear deterrence, they are denying the most ardent aspirations of humanity as well as the opinion of the highest legal authority in the world. The gravest consequences for mankind lie ahead if the world is to be ruled by the militarism represented by nuclear weapons rather than the humanitarian law espoused by the International Court of Justice.

Nuclear weapons are incompatible with the peace we seek for the 21st century. They cannot be justified. They deserve condemnation. The preservation of the Non Proliferation Treaty demands an unequivocal commitment to their abolition.

The Holy See has previously stated in this Committee: "The world must move to the abolition of nuclear weapons through a universal, non-discriminatory ban with intensive inspection by a universal authority". Today we repeat those words, conscious that there is a gathering momentum of world opinion in support of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. This is a moral challenge, a legal challenge and a political challenge. That multiple based challenge must be met by the application of our humanity.

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