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Pope Francis Calls for the Complete Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Santa Fe, NM – In his speech today at the United Nations Pope Francis stated:

The Preamble and the first Article of the Charter of the United Nations set forth the foundations of the international juridical framework: peace, the pacific solution of disputes and the development of friendly relations between the nations. Strongly opposed to such statements, and in practice denying them, is the constant tendency to the proliferation of arms, especially weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear weapons. An ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction – and possibly the destruction of all mankind – are self-contradictory and an affront to the entire framework of the United Nations, which would end up as “nations united by fear and distrust.” There is urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the non-proliferation Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons.

Separately, the United Nations’ Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon released a statement in advance of tomorrow’s (September 26) International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons tomorrow. He said:

The norm against the use of nuclear weapons – the most destructive weapons ever created, with potentially unparalleled human costs – has stood strong for seven decades. But the only absolute guarantee that they are never used again is through their total elimination.

The Pope’s words build upon a December 2014 paper entitled “Nuclear Weapons: Time for Abolition” that the Vatican presented at the 3rd International Conference on Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna, Dec. 2014. In it, the Catholic Church declared that the provisional justification it once gave for possession of nuclear weapons for the sake of “deterrence” during the Cold War is no longer valid. The Vatican further stated in no uncertain terms, “Now is the time to affirm not only the immorality of the use of nuclear weapons, but the immorality of their possession, thereby clearing the road to nuclear abolition.”

Contrary to the Catholic Church’s growing push to ban nuclear weapons, the recent May 2015 NonProliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference ended in failure. The immediate reason was that the United States, United Kingdom and Canada blocked the adoption of a “Final Document” seeking to implement a previously agreed-to conference on a Middle East nuclear weapons free zone, at the behest of Israel, a non-signatory to the NPT and a non-declared nuclear weapons power. A broader, deeper reason is that the majority of non-weapons states are growing increasingly frustrated by the nuclear weapons powers’ failure to honor their NPT Article VI

obligation “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament...”, first promised in 1970. This is now exacerbated by accelerating nuclear weapons “modernization” programs, led by the United States which plans to spend a trillion dollars over thirty years completely rebuilding its nuclear weapons stockpile and infrastructure.

New Mexico plays a key role in these modernization programs, with two of the nation’s three nuclear weapons laboratories, Sandia and Los Alamos. Currently the labs’ main focus are “Life Extension Programs” that prolong the service lives of existing U.S. nuclear weapons for up to 60 years and give them new military capabilities despite U.S. government denials. These programs are clearly contrary to the Vatican’s push for nuclear weapons abolition.

New Mexico also has one of the highest percentages of Catholic citizens, at around 40% of the total population. The full name of its capitol Santa Fe (English: “Holy Faith”) is “The Royal City of the Holy Faith of Saint Francis of Assisi,” the saint from whom Pope Francis took his papal name. St. Francis and the Pope are both known for their focus on the poor. Ironically, Los Alamos County, next to Santa Fe, is the second richest county in the USA because of nuclear weapons programs, while some of the poorest communities in the country (the San Ildefonso and Santa Clara Pueblos) are contiguous to it.

One of New Mexico’s two Catholic Archbishops, Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, is chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishop’s Committee on International Justice and Peace, and is playing a leading role in the Catholic Church’s accelerating push for nuclear weapons abolition. He delivered a homily at the Nagasaki Cathedral in Japan on August 9, 2015 commemorating the 70th anniversary of the city’s destruction by a plutonium bomb designed and produced in New Mexico. He described it as a life-changing experience, and declared:

The bishops of the United States join in solidarity with the Church in Japan in advocating for global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament in the face of the tragedies that occurred here when atomic bombs struck...” The U.S. bishops committed themselves to shaping “the climate of opinion which will make it possible for our country to express profound sorrow over the atomic bombing in 1945. Without that sorrow, there is no possibility of finding a way to repudiate future use of nuclear weapons....”

New Mexico’s other archbishop, Santa Fe’s newly installed John Wester, has not yet stated his position on nuclear weapons. His diocese includes the Los Alamos and Sandia National Labs.

Jay Coghlan, director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented, “Northern New Mexico has been a Catholic stronghold for centuries, and was the birthplace of nuclear weapons seventy years ago. Catholics and non-Catholics alike must examine their consciences and the Pope’s calling for the prohibition of nuclear weapons, and how that squares with the nuclear weapons industry that is so deeply embedded in our culture and economy. The choice is not easy, but clearly we must follow faith and good will toward elimination of these worst of weapons of mass destruction. I hope that Santa Fe’s new Archbishop John Wester will help guide us in following Pope Francis’ call for the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons.”

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Pope Francis' quote is from <http://time.com/4049905/pope-francis-us-visit-united-nations-speech-transcript/>

Note: the original transcript erroneously said “weapons of mass distraction” instead of “weapons of mass destruction.”

The Vatican's December 2014 paper “Nuclear Weapons: Time for Abolition” is available at <http://www.paxchristi.net/sites/default/files/nuclearweaponstimeforabolitionfinal.pdf>

See Archbishop Oscar Cantú's essays on the need to abolish nuclear weapons at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/war-and-peace/nuclear-weapons/>

In particular, see [Homily on Peace and a World without Nuclear Weapons for a Mass at Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki, Japan](#) *Bishop Oscar Cantú, August 9, 2015*