



His Holiness, Pope Francis I
Palazzo Apostolico
00120 Città del Vaticano

Brussels, 17 June 2019

Your Holiness,

We greet you warmly and with thanksgiving for the hope you bring in God's name to people in many lands. May God continue to grant you compassion and joy on your way.

With Pax Christi members around the world including the Japan Catholic Council for Justice and Peace, we are looking forward to your trip to Japan this November. We pray that the journey will be a pilgrimage of peace, a mission of healing and a pastoral visit that lifts up nonviolence as a foundational ethic for building cultures of peace and sustainable development.

Japan is not the only nation to have suffered war but it is the only nation to have suffered a horror that must never happen again, nuclear war. What is more, the danger that others may suffer the fate of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is as great today as at any time since 1945.

There are now three generations of courageous hibakusha advocating for a world free of nuclear weapons. Japan's Red Cross hospitals still endeavour to heal them from radiation sickness, a lifetime after the atomic bombings. As people of faith and as a global Catholic movement for peace, we are inspired by the *hibakusha's* powerful nonviolent witness. We are also inspired by faithful members of Plowshares who risk imprisonment with symbolic actions recalling Isaiah 2:4 at nuclear weapons bases today.

There is great need for the healing of hearts hardened by nuclear weapons. This is especially so in countries that possess nuclear weapons, or rely on them as in the case of Japan. May your visit be a catalyst for changes-of-heart.

We are grateful for your leadership, for the diplomacy of the Holy See and for the convening power of the Vatican in this critical field. Such efforts help guide Pax Christi members in our public witness and in outreach to governments at home and at the United Nations.

We thank you for your spiritual and moral leadership during the humanitarian initiative which led to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017. Within the Christian family and beyond, many have taken heart from wise and courageous admonitions such as these:

“[T]he threat of [nuclear weapons] use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned.”ⁱ “Weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, create

nothing but a false sense of security. They cannot constitute the basis for peaceful coexistence between members of the human family, which must rather be inspired by an ethics of solidarity.”ⁱⁱ

As well as from the integral vision which anchors such calls:

“[T]he real priorities facing our human family, such as the fight against poverty, the promotion of peace, the undertaking of educational, ecological and healthcare projects, and the development of human rights, are relegated to second place.”ⁱⁱⁱ “Achieving a world without nuclear weapons [is] based on the awareness that *everything is connected* within the perspective of an integral ecology. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.”^{iv}

Our Pax Christi representatives heard these words with joy at the Vatican and the United Nations. We can testify along with fellow members of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons that such convictions are bearing fruit. The new treaty explicitly affirms “public conscience”, “the principles of humanity” and the role of “religious leaders”. It is fitting that the Holy See stands among the first to sign and ratify the new accord.

With all this in mind, Holy Father, we would earnestly request that your visit to Japan might include:

- The delivery of a message calling for the complete and urgent abolition of nuclear weapons.
- Meeting with representatives of the hibakusha and with witnesses for peace from Plowshares; an affirmation of the Hibakusha Appeal International Signature Campaign
- A call to the government of Japan to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, to step away from reliance on nuclear arms and to provide leadership for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The hopes of Christians and people of other faiths will travel with you to Japan. So will the hopes of concerned citizens throughout Northeast Asia, whose nations face growing nuclear threats along with Japan.

In May 2020, Pax Christi International will also make a pilgrimage to Hiroshima—to celebrate the 75th anniversary of our movement. We hold you and your visit in prayer.

In Christ’s peace,



Kevin Dowling
Co-President Pax Christi International



Marie Dennis
Co-President Pax Christi International

ⁱ **Papal Address** at the International Symposium on the Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament, Vatican City, 10 November 2017

ⁱⁱ **Papal Message** to the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, New York, 27 March 2017

ⁱⁱⁱ **Papal Message** to the Third Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, Vienna, 7 December 2014.

^{iv} **Laudato Si**, 117, 138, 139.