



## **A world without nuclear weapons is possible**

### **The Holy See takes on a leading role in abolishing nuclear weapons**

Pax Christi International wishes to highlight the importance of the intersection of law and morality as a central theme at the third conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Vienna, Austria, 8 – 9 December 2014.<sup>1</sup> Nuclear weapons raise profound moral and ethical questions that go beyond debates regarding their legality. Efforts are needed now to stigmatise, prohibit, and eliminate these weapons of terror.

One hundred and fifty-eight states participated in the Vienna conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. More than hundred international, civil society, academic and religious organisations including Pax Christi International listened to two days of testimony about nuclear weapons from experts on health, humanitarian and environmental law, climate change, agriculture and the global economy. Forty-four of the states present called for a ban on nuclear weapons. The Holy See is assuming leadership on the humanitarian consequences of weapons of mass destruction, as they did for the anti-personnel mines and the cluster munitions.

#### The Holy See takes up a leadership role for nuclear disarmament

In his opening message, Pope Francis called for nuclear weapons to be banned “once and for all,” adopting “the ethic of responsibility” to replace “the ethic of fear.” The message called for an ethic of solidarity which encourages people to work together for a more secure world, and a future that is increasingly rooted in moral values and responsibility on a global scale. Pope Francis encouraged all the victims of nuclear weapons and nuclear testing to be prophetic voices by calling the human family to a deeper appreciation of beauty, love, cooperation and fraternity, while reminding the world of the risks of nuclear weapons which have the potential to destroy all people and civilization.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/disarmament/weapons-of-mass-destruction/nuclear-weapons-and-nuclear-terrorism/vienna-conference-on-the-humanitarian-impact-of-nuclear-weapons/>

His message questioned the doctrine of nuclear deterrence that was developed during the Cold War: "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."<sup>2</sup>

Pope Francis also referenced disarmament for development: "Spending on nuclear weapons squanders the wealth of nations. To prioritise such spending is a mistake and a misallocation of resources which could be far better invested in the areas of integral human development, education, health and the fight against extreme poverty. When these resources are squandered, the poor and the weak living on the margins of society pay the price."<sup>3</sup> The Pope concluded his message by saying that nuclear weapons should be banned once and for all.

In his statement at the conference, Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, the Permanent Representative of the Holy See at the United Nations in Geneva said that our world faces enormous challenges and that "In particular, to continue investing in the production and the modernisation of nuclear weapons is not logical. Billions are wasted each year to develop and maintain stocks that will supposedly never be used. Can one justify such a high cost for reasons of status?" "Ethical and humanitarian consequences of the possession and use of nuclear weapons are catastrophic and beyond the rational and reasonable."<sup>4</sup>

### Time for abolition

"Nuclear Disarmament: Time for Abolition" is the title of a longer statement provided at the conference by the Holy See on 8 December 2014.<sup>5</sup> This document also questions the doctrine of nuclear deterrence: "Contrary to the frequent assertions of nuclear strategists, the history of the nuclear age has shown that nuclear deterrence has failed to prevent unanticipated events that might have led to nuclear war between possessing states. These include: nuclear accidents, malfunctions, mishaps, false alarms and close calls. Even the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, previously characterized in popular literature as a success for diplomatic brinkmanship, involved events that all too easily could have launched a nuclear war independent of the intentions of national decision-makers."

The Holy See admits that the very possession of nuclear weapons, even for purposes of deterrence, is "morally problematic". "While a consensus continues to grow that any possible use of such weapons is radically inconsistent with the demands of human dignity, in the past the Church has nonetheless expressed a provisional acceptance of their possession for reasons of deterrence, under the condition that this be 'a step on the way toward progressive disarmament'. This condition has not been fulfilled—far from it. In the absence of further progress toward complete disarmament, and without concrete steps toward a more secure and a more genuine peace, the nuclear weapon establishment has lost much of its legitimacy."

The statement concludes that the time has come to embrace the abolition of nuclear weapons as an essential foundation of collective security. "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."

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.news.va/en/news/message-of-the-holy-father-on-the-occasion-of-the>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, page 2.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/statement-holy-see-nuclear-weapon-abolition>

<sup>5</sup> <http://archive.paxchristi.net/MISC/2014-0393-en-gl-SD.pdf>

## I Can and We Can!

A Civil Society Forum organised by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)<sup>6</sup> to lead the governmental conference brought together 650 people from some 200 organisations around the world. Participants included delegates from Member Organisations of Pax Christi International from the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Austria, Flanders and the Philippines, as well as a delegate from the International Secretariat.

Pax Christi International was present during the marketplace that was created to welcome and show the diversity of organisations involved in nuclear disarmament. It became a space to meet, act and learn.

On 5 December 2014, the annual Peace Award of the International Peace Bureau was given to the people and the government of the Marshall Islands that started a lawsuit asking all nine nuclear powers to fulfil their nuclear disarmament obligations as recompense for the damage done to their country.<sup>7</sup>

## Towards a new momentum in 2015?

The 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2015 was often cited in Vienna. Speakers said that it must serve as a historic deadline for achieving the progress which the three conferences (Norway (2013), Mexico and Austria (2014)), and a parallel series of majority statements at the United Nations, have now embedded in the international agenda.

Pax Christi International will be present during the 9<sup>th</sup> Review Conference on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that will be held in New York, 27 April – 22 May 2015. Participating governments will discuss nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy with a view to arrive at a consensus on a number of issues. Pax Christi International will focus on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, as well as pleading for a total ban on these weapons.

The role of Pax Christi International is vital to not let hope die, to not let cynicism and realpolitik take over. Pax Christi International believes that an ethic rooted in solidarity and peaceful coexistence is necessary for the future of humanity.

Brussels, 19 December 2014

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.icanw.org/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.ipb.org/web/index.php?mostra=news&menu=News&id\\_nom=Sean+MacBride+Peace+Prize+awarded+to+Marshall+Islands](http://www.ipb.org/web/index.php?mostra=news&menu=News&id_nom=Sean+MacBride+Peace+Prize+awarded+to+Marshall+Islands)