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Statement on the Convening of the NonProliferation Treaty's Eleventh Review Conference

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We are the Archbishops of Santa Fe, Seattle and Nagasaki and the Bishop of Hiroshima. Three years ago, in Nagasaki on the 78th anniversary of its atomic bombing, we Catholic leaders formally created the Partnership for a World without Nuclear Weapons to work on nuclear disarmament. Our four dioceses represent the birthplace of nuclear weapons, the most deployed nuclear weapons in the United States, and the only two cities that to date have suffered atomic bombings.

We follow in the footsteps of our late Pope Francis who declared that the mere possession of nuclear weapons is immoral. We are guided today by our Pope Leo, who in his 2026 World Peace Day address declared:

“The idea of the deterrent power of military might, especially nuclear deterrence, is based on the irrationality of relations between nations, built not on law, justice and trust, but on fear and domination by force.”

Here we believe that our Holy Father gets into the heart of the matter. For 56 years the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty (NPT) has acted as the cornerstone of nuclear weapons nonproliferation. However, the Treaty is now badly frayed, perhaps even in danger of collapsing. This is primarily due to the never-ending refusal of the nuclear weapons states to enter into serious negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament, which they pledged to long ago in NPT Article VI.

The one word rationale for this failure is always “deterrence,” that is to deter others from using nuclear weapons. But this deflects the blame from their own possession of immoral, genocidal weapons. One must ask, why is it that Russia and the United States have always rejected the minimal deterrence of just a few hundred nuclear warheads in order to keep thousands of warheads for nuclear warfighting? Why is it that all nine nuclear weapons powers are now spending enormous sums on so-called “modernization” programs to keep nuclear weapons forever?

Our Pope Leo calls for a world built on law, justice and peace. It is our God-given duty to pursue that. The U.S. Constitution enshrines international treaties as the “supreme Law of the Land.” The essential bargain of the NPT was that the nuclear weapons powers promised to negotiate nuclear disarmament, in exchange for which all other nations promised to never acquire them. The nuclear weapons powers have not upheld their end of this legal bargain.

The NPT has been absolutely indispensable in limiting nuclear weapons proliferation to three non-NPT signatories (India, Pakistan and Israel) and one withdrawal (North Korea). But the last two NPT Review Conferences have utterly failed to outline any concrete steps toward nuclear disarmament. We don't see how this one will succeed where the others have failed. Clearly the nuclear threats are escalating. The brutal practice of might makes right is ascendant, arms control treaties are gone, and we are sliding backwards with massive modernization programs to keep nuclear weapons forever.

We wish all of you at this NonProliferation Treaty Review Conference the very best of luck. We fervently hope and pray for a favorable outcome that genuinely leads to nuclear disarmament.

However, if past is prologue, that outcome is unlikely. If that is unfortunately the case, we will then put our faith in the first Review Conference of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), to be held this late November at the United Nations. The Vatican was the first nation-state to sign and ratify the TPNW. We will be there to help witness its further implementation.

Please know of our continued prayers for peace and healing. May you all help lead this suffering world to the promised land of a world free of nuclear weapons.

We deeply thank you for your efforts and pray for your every success.

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