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Easter Gift

Pope Francis calls for a world without nuclear weapons and supports their abolition

- Homepage - News - External sources -

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This year the Easter bells came from afar and early, in defiance of custom, reaching New York before the end of March. On 27-28 March, they dropped on the UN building, near the famous revolver with a twisted barrel, three beautiful gifts.

First of all was the opening of the Conference for banning nuclear weapons and preparing their elimination. Then a message from the Pope calling for God's blessing on all the participants and the peoples they represent. A pity that France was absent. Then as a result of the first vote there came the agreement that two delegations previously admitted only as observers should have a right to vote: the Holy See and Palestine. In short God and Allah were admitted into the sanctuary, in the absence of Yahweh who boycotted the session but who surely will end up coming to the negotiating table or the treaty, so as to make the Middle East a nuclear-free zone

According to the French Conference of Bishops (Conférence des évêques de France) "Easter celebrates the resurrection of Christ, his victory over death which is the central element of the Christian faith". Why not over atomic death? That victory actually depends to some degree on the bishops and Catholics of France. They just need to open their ears to the Pope's words.

The message from Pope Francis was read by Mgr Antoine Camilleri, undersecretary for relations with states and head of the Holy See' delegation to the Conference. The conference president was Costa Rica's ambassador, Her Excellency Elayne White-Gomez, ambassadeur du Costa-Rica.

Message from the Holy Father to the Conference:

To Her Excellency Elayne Whyte Gómez
President of the United Nations Conference
to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument
to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons,
Leading Towards their Total Elimination

I extend cordial greetings to you, Madam President, and to all the representatives of the various nations and international organizations, and of civil society participating in this Conference. I wish to encourage you to work with determination in order to promote the conditions necessary for a world without nuclear weapons.

On 25 September 2015, before the General Assembly of the United Nations, I emphasized what the Preamble and first Article of the United Nations Charter indicate as the foundations of the international juridical framework: peace, the pacific solution of disputes and the development of friendly relations between nations. An ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction - and possibly the destruction of all mankind - are contradictory to the very spirit of the United Nations. We must therefore commit ourselves to a world without nuclear weapons, by fully implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty, both in letter and spirit (cf. Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, 25

September 2015).

But why give ourselves this demanding and forward-looking goal in the present international context characterized by an unstable climate of conflict, which is both cause and indication of the difficulties encountered in advancing and strengthening the process of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation?

If we take into consideration the principal threats to peace and security with their many dimensions in this multipolar world of the twenty-first century as, for example, terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental problems, poverty, not a few doubts arise regarding the inadequacy of nuclear deterrence as an effective response to such challenges. These concerns are even greater when we consider the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would follow from any use of nuclear weapons, with devastating, indiscriminate and uncontrollable effects, over time and space. Similar cause for concern arises when examining the waste of resources spent on nuclear issues for military purposes, which could instead be used for worthy priorities like the promotion of peace and integral human development, as well as the fight against poverty, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples.

International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power. Peace must be built on justice, on integral human development, on respect for fundamental human rights, on the protection of creation, on the participation of all in public life, on trust between peoples, on the support of peaceful institutions, on access to education and health, on dialogue and solidarity. From this perspective, we need to go beyond nuclear deterrence: the international community is called upon to adopt forward-looking strategies to promote the goal of peace and stability and to avoid short-sighted approaches to the problems surrounding national and international security.

In this context, the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative. A concrete approach should promote a reflection on an ethics of peace and multilateral and cooperative security that goes beyond the fear and isolationism that prevail in many debates today. Achieving a world without nuclear weapons involves a long-term process, based on the awareness that "everything is connected" within the perspective of an integral ecology (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 117, 138). The common destiny of mankind demands the pragmatic strengthening of dialogue and the building and consolidating of mechanisms of trust and cooperation, capable of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.

Growing interdependence and globalization mean that any response to the threat of nuclear weapons should be collective and concerted, based on mutual trust. This trust can be built only through dialogue that is truly directed to the common good and not to the protection of veiled or particular interests; such dialogue, as far as possible, should include all: nuclear states, countries which do not possess nuclear weapons, the military and private sectors, religious communities, civil societies, and international organizations. And in this endeavour we must avoid those forms of mutual recrimination and polarization which hinder dialogue rather than encourage it.

Humanity has the ability to work together in building up our common home; we have the freedom, intelligence and capacity to lead and direct technology, to place limits on our power, and to put all this at the service of another type of progress: one that is more human, social and integral (cf. *ibid.*, 13, 78, 112; Message for the 22nd Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Agreement on Climate Change (COP22), 10 November 2016).

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This Conference intends to negotiate a Treaty inspired by ethical and moral arguments. It is an exercise in hope and it is my wish that it may also constitute a decisive step along the road towards a world without nuclear weapons. Although this is a significantly complex and long-term goal, it is not beyond our reach.

Madam President, I sincerely wish that the efforts of this Conference may be fruitful and provide an effective contribution to advancing an ethic of peace and of multilateral and cooperative security, which humanity very much needs today. Upon all those gathered at this important meeting, and upon the citizens of the countries you represent, I invoke the blessings of the Almighty.

FRANCIS

From the Vatican, 23 March 2017