

# 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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## **Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: ethical dimensions and security challenges**

**Submitted by the Holy See**

### **I. Introduction**

1. The Holy See trusts that the forthcoming tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will result in concrete action in accordance with our joint intention “to achieve at the earliest possible date the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to undertake effective measures in the direction of nuclear disarmament”.<sup>1</sup>

#### **“A world free of nuclear weapons is both possible and necessary”**

2. The year 2020 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and 25 years since the States parties renewed it indefinitely. From 1995 to 2010, the Review Conferences of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons provided occasions for developing and clarifying the legal obligations undertaken by States parties and the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime’s effectiveness and equity in its demands to nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States. During those years, we have seen a record of limited progress and unfulfilled commitments to be reconsidered urgently at the postponed 2020 Review Conference.

3. In addition, the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons introduces a contribution to the efforts to fully implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty commitment to nuclear disarmament,<sup>2</sup> with its proponents affirming its compatibility with the Non-Proliferation Treaty but some nuclear powers asserting that it undermines the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime. Addressing that

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, address to the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, New York, 25 September 2020, quoting the preamble of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

<sup>2</sup> Contribution of the Holy See to the first meeting of States parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Vienna, 21–23 June 2022): “The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: a path for dialogue and action”.



difference in a new integrated arms control and nuclear disarmament regime portends to be a challenge facing the 2020 Review Conference.

4. Moreover, the emerging geostrategic environment and the current conflict in Ukraine, as well as evolving technologies, pose new challenges for the conferees to address. Accordingly, the 2020 Review Conference faces a heavy agenda.

## **II. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: historical process and its challenges**

5. The Treaty endeavoured to bring stability to the volatile nuclear arms race. It set forth three goals: (a) prevent the spread of nuclear weapons;<sup>3</sup> (b) promote disarmament by all State parties, including negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament;<sup>4</sup> and (c) guarantee nuclear development solely for civilian purposes.<sup>5</sup>

6. In 1968, arms controllers estimated that 20 to 30 States might eventually possess nuclear weapons. Today, fewer than 10 do. In that respect, the Treaty may be regarded as having had a certain degree of success.

7. The quinquennial Review Conferences have provided occasion to assess progress and setbacks on the Treaty goals, address emergent problems and set new objectives. At the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the States parties renewed the Treaty indefinitely and without condition and advanced the pursuit of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, a proposal renewed in 2010 but never fully executed. The 2000 Review Conference provided a list of 13 practical steps towards fulfilling the requirement under Article VI to pursue nuclear and general disarmament. In the intervening years, the nuclear-weapon States failed to follow through on many of these recommendations. The 2010 Review Conference also renewed support for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. It recognized the legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon States to request nuclear-weapon States to reduce the operational status of their nuclear weapons. It also urged total disarmament and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons.

### **Current and future challenges**

8. The unfinished work of the last quarter-century of Review Conferences, beginning with the Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, are obviously high priorities for the upcoming meeting, but the fact that they have been proposed repeatedly and never implemented should provide reason for careful strategizing about how to engage States parties in their realization.

9. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on 22 January 2021. Even though it occasioned some debate, its entry into force presents an opportunity to build consensus around the complementarity of the two Treaties.

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<sup>3</sup> Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, arts. I, II and III.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., art. VI.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., arts. IV and V.

10. Furthermore, the world seems to have regressed into a new dynamic, reminiscent of the 1950s and early 1960s, that lacks the predictability and stabilizing elements of the late cold war. On top of this, we are currently witnessing escalating rhetoric with threats of use of nuclear weapons. Ignoring the distinction between conventional and nuclear warfare, the current discourse leaves all scenarios open, even that of an annihilating nuclear response to defensive actions of a conventional nature. The risk that nuclear weapons might be employed in the conflict lends added urgency to the work of the 2020 Review Conference to uphold and extend the security of non-nuclear-weapons States, in particular against threats from States that possess nuclear weapons, through progress on establishing legally binding negative security assurances. Moreover, eroding respect for the principles of international law and for bilateral and multilateral agreements greatly undermines any trust within the international community. Nuclear weapons in the current geopolitical context cannot be regarded anymore as instruments ensuring the “status quo” by providing “a certain balance of power”. This renders them even more dangerous than during the cold war, making the scenario of a nuclear war real.

11. A plethora of new challenges to the nuclear non-proliferation/disarmament regime demands careful attention; these can be categorized under the headings of power, vulnerability, interconnectedness and loss of moral accountability:

#### • Power

*Modernization programmes.* The destructive power of nuclear arsenals is increasing by integrating new discoveries into nuclear programmes; such an increase concerns both delivery systems and weapons. Artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons and cybertechnologies put at the service of nuclear armament programmes destabilize deterrence and undermine the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime.

*Flexible strategies.* Some States regard nuclear weapons as a hedge against overwhelming conventional superiority on the part of their adversaries. Military doctrines of the leading nuclear-weapon States contemplate deploying nuclear weapons against non-nuclear threats and even to prevent a significant loss in a conventional conflict.

*Loss of the firebreak.* A further challenge is the loss of the cold war confidence that one could maintain, in policy and military practice, a “firebreak” between conventional and nuclear war. Strategies in which nuclear strikes are contemplated to prevent forcefully or to retaliate for non-nuclear attacks (chemical and biological, but also conventional or cyber), and even to avert defeat in a losing conflict, threaten the global common good, creating a much-increased threat to peace and global stability.

#### • Vulnerability

*Progressive erosion of the arms control regime.* A geopolitical development that marks the vulnerability of the new nuclear era is shown by the abandonment of the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles. Furthermore, the United States and the Russian Federation have withdrawn from the Treaty on Open Skies, and this decision has led to doubts that that Treaty can remain viable. One sign of hope for the 2020 Review Conference is that the United States and the Russian Federation have renewed the Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START Treaty) and had begun an important dialogue, which has subsequently been gravely undermined by the conflict in Ukraine and its wider implications for the security architecture in Europe and globally.

*New technologies.* Advancements in delivery systems and in cybertechnologies raise the risks posed by the possession of nuclear weapons. New delivery systems technology (hypersonic platforms, evasive trajectories and submarine drones) shrinks decision-making and response times and thereby heightens the pressures for nuclear use. Cybertechnologies make nuclear command, control and communications systems, early warning systems and launch systems vulnerable, even to anonymous hacking, increasing the risk of nuclear accidents. This becomes particularly worrisome when autonomous components are integrated into nuclear weapons systems. Indeed, their integration could put nuclear war beyond human control, whereas human judgment is invaluable in correcting computer errors and avoiding nuclear accidents, nuclear escalation and nuclear use. Human responsibility over nuclear weapons can never be superseded by autonomous decisions.

*Artificial intelligence.* The use of artificial intelligence with nuclear weapons systems poses serious risks of deep fakes and poisoned data triggering nuclear weapons use in quick response to false information. No digital technologies can be made completely safe and protected from cyberattacks, but nuclear weapons systems have particular vulnerabilities. Systems currently in operation contain many diverse devices using operating systems of various ages and origins, whose software has been updated and patched many times. Perversely, “modernization” may unintentionally increase these digital vulnerabilities.

#### • **Interconnectedness**

*Multipolarity.* During the cold war, the international system was bipolar and nuclear powers other than the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics played a limited role in the global balance of power. Today, however, nuclear powers, some of which remain outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty, have multiple rivalries among them. Currently, there is a disturbing increase of support facilities towards the production of means to use nuclear weapons.

*Strategic instability.* Another issue that adversely affects the Non-Proliferation Treaty is the disparate understanding of stability. Divergent perceptions of threat on the part of policymakers of certain nuclear-weapon States diminish first-strike stability and crisis stability, severely impairing predictability and transparency at times of tension. Many of the threat reduction and crisis management initiatives undertaken during the post-cold war era (e.g. threat reduction centres, hotlines, crisis management protocols, military-to-military exchanges and efforts to prevent theft of fissile materials) have shut down or been greatly diminished.

#### • **Loss of moral accountability**

*Human exposure.* The risk posed to humanity is increasing in direct proportion to the growth and sophistication of nuclear weapons systems, the expansion of human and planetary vulnerability and the escalation in global interconnectedness. This is because “our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience”.<sup>6</sup>

*Respect for international law.* It is not by chance that the Non-Proliferation Treaty preamble calls us to “take measures to safeguard the security of peoples”.<sup>7</sup> Only under the checks and balances of international agreements – such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, encyclical letter “*Laudato Si'*”: On Care for Our Common Home”, 24 May 2015, para. 105.

<sup>7</sup> Non-Proliferation Treaty, preamble, para. 1.

agreements framework, the nuclear-weapon-free zones, the New START Treaty and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – can humanity support the burden of nuclear responsibility, at least in the time necessary to achieve nuclear disarmament with the final aim of achieving a nuclear-weapons-free world. Every attempt to undermine treaties increases human vulnerability to nuclear weapons.

### **The quest for international and integral security and peace**

12. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic underlines the depth of the cracks in the unity of the human family, by “exposing our false securities”.<sup>8</sup> It has served as a catalyst that helps us clearly visualize the problems that the twenty-first century poses to our security, to peace and to the transition towards a nuclear-weapons-free world. “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”.<sup>9</sup> We should ask ourselves what kind of security we want, and what the most effective means are to ensure such security. The pandemic itself is teaching us a great deal: a significant lesson is the need to reconsider our concept of security towards a wider concept of “integral security”. From this perspective, it is necessary to go beyond nuclear deterrence: integral security demands that the international system surrender the adherence of some of its members to nuclear deterrence. The international community is called to adopt forward-looking strategies to promote this goal of international peace and security and to avoid short-sighted approaches to national and international security problems.

### **III. “Everything is interconnected”: defining common objectives**

13. The Holy See commends and supports the many activities that have strengthened international cooperation and contributed in a significant way both to the prevention of nuclear proliferation and to the promotion of nuclear disarmament; such activities also help to foster integral human development, care for our common home, human fraternity and social friendship. The Holy See is convinced that the spirit and the letter of the preamble of the Non-Proliferation Treaty shares a similar view of nuclear weapons as instruments posing obstacles to development, the environment and human fraternity.<sup>10</sup>

14. As the current geopolitical developments also demonstrate, the very existence of nuclear weapons supposes the acceptance of the idea according to which the dignity of millions of human beings can be sacrificed for the security of some, severing the integrity of the human family. Such weapons keep us caught in the “security dilemma”.<sup>11</sup> Nuclear weapons assume also that the environment can be sacrificed, destroyed and annihilated for the same reason.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis, extraordinary moment of prayer in time of pandemics, Sagrato of Saint Peter’s Basilica, 27 March 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., message to the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination, New York, 23 March 2017.

<sup>10</sup> “The context for the purpose of the interpretation of a Treaty shall comprise, in addition to the text, including its preamble and annexes, any [...]” (Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, art. 31.2).

<sup>11</sup> Constant securitization, aggravating the fear and power dynamics that motivated the process in the first place.

15. The existence and continued possession and modernization of nuclear weapons also raise ethical questions concerning development and the environment. It is inconsistent to strive to implement commitments on integral human development and the care of our common home while retaining weapons that have the potential to cause devastating humanitarian and ecological consequences. An intentional or accidental nuclear detonation would instantly annihilate the achievements of global efforts to advance sustainable development and ecology. Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations contains very clear indications in this regard: the maintenance of international peace and security shall be promoted “with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources”.

## Integral human development

16. Any effort to see social advancement and to promote the common good must be based on a desire to ensure the integral development of every human being. As affirmed by the Declaration on the Right to Development of 1986: “The human person is the central subject of development”.<sup>12</sup> As Pope Francis has also said, “We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral”.<sup>13</sup>

17. Despite that, “the escalation of the arms race continues unabated and the price of modernizing and developing weaponry, not only nuclear weapons, represents a considerable expense for nations. As a result, the real priorities facing our human family, such as the fight against poverty and hunger, the promotion of peace, the undertaking of educational, ecological and health-care projects, and the development of human rights, are relegated to second place”.<sup>14</sup>

18. As the pandemic has thrown light on both the necessity and the difficulties of facing these priorities, the preamble of the Non-Proliferation Treaty helps remind us how the Treaty could help to address them. Indeed, it clearly affirms that “the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security are to be promoted with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources”.<sup>15</sup> The preamble adopts a holistic and integral vision of disarmament, considering also its positive externalities. Disarmament not only pacifies international relations, but also allows States to dedicate important resources to the most vulnerable. These resources are essential to promote integral human development and peace. The “idol” that we refer to as security is best understood in terms of real priorities affecting the human family. Reallocation of resources from armaments to integral human development is an ethical imperative, even more so amid the global pandemic.

19. Integral human development is not simply an exercise of economic restructuring, but it is rather a pursuit of connecting humanity to itself and to the Earth. It is development that is not only concerned with technological progress, but rather with the good of the human person as a whole, including one’s relationship with the community, culture and the environment, as well as its transcendent dimension. Integral human development aims at guaranteeing concrete rights for all that could be easily financed by only a portion of the money currently spent on stockpiling and modernizing arms. In a time of global pandemic and large-scale security, social, economic, food, energy and climate crises, this appeal deserves to be

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, art. 2.1, 4 December 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, “*Laudato Si*”, para. 112.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., message to the International Symposium on the Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament, the Vatican, Rome, 10 November 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Non-Proliferation Treaty preamble, para. 12.

heard now more than ever. Authentic and lasting peace is inconceivable without the development of every person and all people. In the same way, poverty reduction strategies cannot be pursued apart from disarmament and peace efforts.

20. “Future generations will rise to condemn our failure if we spoke of peace but did not act to bring it about among the peoples of the Earth. How can we speak of peace even as we build terrifying new weapons of war?”<sup>16</sup>

### **Care for our common home**

21. “The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not, we burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others”.<sup>17</sup>

22. Besides the humanitarian consequences on people, in order to appreciate fully the importance of disarmament, we must give due consideration also to the effects of weapons on the environment. Since human flourishing is inseparable from environmental health, an integral security approach must also prioritize care for the environment.

23. On the contrary, “war always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and biological weapons”.<sup>18</sup> Nuclear disarmament should thus be pursued also in the name of environmental protection, since as long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of their intentional or accidental use poses serious threats to the environment: they can be considered as weapons of mass environmental destruction.

24. This constitutes a further reason why the Holy See supports the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: if we take seriously the care for our common home, we must work tirelessly for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

### **Human fraternity and integral security**

25. “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”.<sup>19</sup>

26. The Non-Proliferation Treaty is aimed at promoting human fraternity towards peace and development. This resonates even more strongly in the face of the challenges of our globalized world, which call for the strengthening of multilateralism through concrete joint initiatives. On the occasion of the 2020 Review Conference, the Holy See recalls the urgent need for a modern global ethic of responsibility, solidarity and cooperative security. During the pandemic, “we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all”.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Meeting for Peace”, Hiroshima, Japan, 24 November 2019.

<sup>17</sup> “*Laudato Si*”, para. 95.

<sup>18</sup> “*Laudato Si*”, para. 57.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, message to the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination, New York, 23 March 2017.

<sup>20</sup> “*Fratelli Tutti*”, para. 7.

Such fragmentation is the most relevant challenge that the 2020 Review Conference has to face: to address it, we must rediscover and unpack the message of unity enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty preamble.

27. The Non-Proliferation Treaty preamble firmly condemns nuclear war in its consideration of “the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples”.<sup>21</sup> From this very clear statement, it is possible to conclude that, first, States agreed that nuclear war be considered a major threat, and, second, that integral security could only be guaranteed by doing everything possible to avoid a nuclear war. Nuclear war is not only a failure of politics but also of human beings and of our respect for all humankind.

28. Moreover, the use of nuclear weapons contradicts two of the conditions according to which States can employ the right of self-defence in compliance with the Charter, specifically Article 51. When analysing the Article and the rulings of the International Court of Justice, it appears that the response to an armed attack, in order to be justified, should, first, be proportionate to the attack, and, second, not justify definitive measures. Yet both conditions would indeed be violated by the use of nuclear weapons.

29. Thus, to be consistent with the law of armed conflict and the principles of international humanitarian law, the use of nuclear weapons, either through a first strike or a second strike, does not comply with the conditions of legitimate defence. A nuclear bombing cannot but be hugely disproportionate and have definitive consequences for the State against which it is used. Faced with the inevitable effects on civil populations, the environment and urban infrastructure, the only valid conclusion seems to be that no State can justify nuclear weapons by appealing to its legitimate right of defence.

30. Furthermore, nuclear weapons, even when used only for deterrence purposes, are never a defensive means, but always a threat, that, as such, break international law and alter the relation between States and diminish the possibility of peace.

31. The Non-Proliferation Treaty preamble clearly declares that: “States must refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations”.<sup>22</sup> States reiterated their commitment, as enshrined in Article 2 (4) of the Charter, to avoid not only the use of force but also the threat of its use. It seems, however, difficult in our time, in light of the extreme power of nuclear weapons and of the vulnerabilities previously discussed, not to consider the existence of nuclear weapons themselves as a threat, all the more so when some of them are in a launch-on-warning posture. “Indeed, nuclear deterrence creates an ethos of fear based on the threat of mutual annihilation”.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, non-proliferation and disarmament are both ethical responsibilities and legal obligations towards all members of the human family.

32. Having considered this, the Holy See wishes to propose a forward-looking vision based on human fraternity and solidarity. Echoing the words of Pope Francis, “Peace and international stability are incompatible with attempts to build upon the fear of mutual destruction or the threat of total annihilation. They can be achieved only on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a

<sup>21</sup> Non-Proliferation Treaty preamble, para. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., para. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the seventy-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly”, New York, 25 September 2020.

future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family of today and tomorrow”.<sup>24</sup>

33. It is deceptive to think that the security and peace of some is divisible from the collective security and peace of others. Drawing inspiration from the concept of human fraternity, originating from the shared dignity of all men and women, it is necessary to question the practice of nuclear deterrence and mutual intimidation from an ethical perspective. Nuclear deterrence entails the distortion of relationships between individuals and peoples, basing international relations not on law and justice but on the dominance of power. How can terror constitute the basis of human relations, let alone the pursuit of fraternity? From this perspective, nuclear deterrence is not to be seen as an end in itself, for it does not create a stable or secure peace. The concept of deterrence cannot be separated from that of the threat of use and/or actual use. After all, research, production, planning, training and modernization are already the first part of “use”. “Use” is not a stand-alone event. It is part of several steps which culminate with “pressing the button”. If deterrence functions, then why would States that already have access to nuclear weapons be so insistent on pushing for non-proliferation? From a deterrence perspective, more nuclear weapons would equate to more peace. It is clear, then, that deterrence theory is based on false premises. Thinking that nuclear war is impossible, based on such considerations, is supremely irresponsible or incoherent. If nuclear weapons exist, if they are possessed by a few or more States, and if they continue to be updated, the scenario of a new nuclear war is real.

34. Pope Francis has spoken out strongly against the entire edifice of nuclear weapons, terming their very existence immoral, and accordingly condemning use of nuclear weapons, nuclear-weapon based deterrence and nuclear-weapon possession.<sup>25</sup>

35. The suggestion that it is necessary to wait for a level of international security that is more conducive to disarmament begs the question, since even the most modest but sincere initiative in the field of disarmament would be an important contribution to creating such a global environment.

36. As the Non-Proliferation Treaty preamble recalls, there can be no peace without nuclear disarmament, and it is on this path that we should all walk during the 2020 Review Conference, in a determined and consensual spirit, mindful that, just as the pandemic has shown, the security of our own future depends on guaranteeing the peaceful security of others. If peace, security and stability are not established globally, they will not be enjoyed at all.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., “Address on Nuclear Weapons”, Nagasaki, Japan, 24 November 2019.

<sup>25</sup> We cannot fail “to be genuinely concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of any employment of nuclear devices. If we also take into account the risk of an accidental detonation as a result of error of any kind, the threat of their use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned. For they exist in the service of a mentality of fear that affects not only the parties in conflict but the entire human race. International relations cannot be held captive to military force, mutual intimidation, and the parading of stockpiles of arms. 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”. Pope Francis, address to the International Symposium “Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Human Disarmament”, 10 November 2017.

## IV. From the Review Conference to a nuclear-weapons-free world

37. In the framework of the above arguments, the Holy See strongly favours a world free from nuclear weapons for the following reasons:

(a) The inadequacy and inappropriateness of nuclear weapons-based defence systems in responding to the national and international security threats of the twenty-first century;

(b) The catastrophic humanitarian and environmental impacts that come from the use of nuclear weapons;

(c) The squandering and misallocation of human and economic resources for their modernization, resources that are subtracted from the complex achievement of objectives such as peace, integral human development and integral security;

(d) The negative consequences that come from a persistent climate of fear, mistrust and opposition generated by their mere possession;

(e) The risk of conventional armed conflict escalating to involve the use of nuclear weapons.

38. The Holy See firmly holds that a world free of nuclear weapons is both possible and necessary. This is in line with the objectives outlined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty preamble:

Desiring to further the easing of international tension and the strengthening of trust between States in order to facilitate the cessation of the manufacture of nuclear weapons, the liquidation of all their existing stockpiles, and the elimination from national arsenals of nuclear weapons and the means of their delivery pursuant to a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.<sup>26</sup>

39. The possibility and the necessity of a nuclear-weapons-free world is also embodied in article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. That article legally obliges all States parties 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, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control”.

40. With the attrition of the existing arms control regime and a new generation of nuclear delivery vehicles under development, decades-long strategies of deterrence have been rendered obsolete. The emergent multipolar nuclear arms race, and the escalating nuclear rhetoric that we are currently witnessing, make the pursuit of nuclear disarmament in the context of general and complete disarmament all the more urgent. The Holy See urges all States parties to take positive steps towards fulfilment of their article VI commitments.

41. To assist in the promotion of general and complete disarmament, the Holy See encourages the shift from a negative to a positive conception of security. The Holy See reaffirms the idea that “Peace cannot ‘be reduced solely to maintaining a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship’”,<sup>27</sup> for peace must be built on justice, socioeconomic development, freedom, respect for fundamental

<sup>26</sup> Non-Proliferation Treaty, preamble, para. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965, para. 78.

human rights, the participation of all in public affairs and the building of trust between peoples.

42. The Holy See encourages the global community to develop a different mentality for what is meant by security. There is a need for a “moral revolution” regarding the concept of security. “The security of our own future depends on guaranteeing the peaceful security of others, for if peace, security and stability are not established globally, they will not be enjoyed at all. Individually and collectively, we are responsible for the present and future well-being of our brothers and sisters”.<sup>28</sup>

43. As long as States conduct themselves as self-interested and isolated entities, competing for limited resources and security, a durable and integral approach to disarmament will never be possible. It is necessary to move from a perspective of competition to one of cooperation. In this regard, it is necessary to engage in profound dialogue concerning the nature of international society, what norms are essential to it, how it is built up, what sort of behaviours are incompatible with this order and what should instead be the essential basis, such as justice, mutual trust and confidence-building measures. The ideal of amity and fraternity should be applied not only to individuals, but also to nations and peoples.

44. As Pope Francis cautioned, “[r]ules by themselves will not suffice if we continue to think that the solution to current problems is deterrence through fear or the threat of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.” What is needed is truly a “conversion of hearts and for the triumph of a culture of life, reconciliation and fraternity. A fraternity that can recognize and respect diversity in the quest for a common destiny”.<sup>29</sup>

45. Here, dialogue has an important role to play: in a too-polarized world, the Holy See has consistently urged nations to lay aside weapons as a means of settling disputes and has always supported the road of dialogue that solves problems and reconciles neighbours. Unfortunately, the language of threats has re-entered the political forums with a vengeance, with a negative effect on fraternity between nations. The current geopolitical situation calls instead for de-escalation, stabilization, dialogue and constructive cooperation in view of progressively rebuilding trust that has been gravely broken. Although actions that undermine international society should be condemned, today it is even more important to emphasize positively what sort of actions build up international society and reinforce human solidarity.

46. The Holy See, in accordance with its specific nature and possibilities, is committed to supporting the initiatives below for this Review Conference and to advancing other confidence-building measures leading to a nuclear-weapons-free world.

## **Ten proposals for achieving a world free from nuclear weapons**

### **1. Non-Proliferation Treaty**

47. Of utmost importance is the continued support of the efforts towards non-proliferation and the fulfilment of the obligations provided for in article VI, with a view of revitalizing the idea of general and complete disarmament. These goals should have concrete and clear timelines; otherwise one runs the risk that the initiative would go on indefinitely and unabated until nuclear weapons are considered necessary.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, “Message on the occasion of the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons”, 7 December 2014.

<sup>29</sup> “Address on Nuclear Weapons”.

48. In this regard, the Holy See would like to underline the value of dialogue and arms control and disarmament as a cooperative strategy designed to avoid unintentional conflict. Only de-escalation, dialogue, cooperation and trust-building can lead to real peace. Winning true peace demands no less valour and commitment than winning a war. There is a need for more “heroes and veterans” of peace.

49. The Holy See also considers that the resumption of a formal discussion on limitations of armaments and on general and complete disarmament, under effective systems of control and verification, would be extremely beneficial to advance the work and objectives of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Because the commitment to pursue general and complete disarmament has been neglected for so long and all the more because of the accelerating character of today’s nuclear arms race, re-engagement with article VI is a special challenge to States parties at this 2020 Review Conference.

## **2. Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty**

50. The Holy See expresses its continued support for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Along with the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons, their mere existence increases the risk of major damage to populations and the environment. It should be underlined that nuclear weapons tests have had severe impacts on public health and the environment, also affecting cultural heritage, food security, water security, indigenous peoples and local communities and creating long-term problems such as land confiscation and population displacement. This is also why previous Review Conferences have called for the cessation of all nuclear weapon test explosions.

51. The Holy See ratified and adheres to the Treaty as an expression of its longstanding conviction that nuclear test bans, nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament are closely linked and must be achieved as quickly as possible under effective international control.

52. Due to the importance the Holy See attributes to the Treaty as an essential part of multilateral efforts to advance peace and global security, each additional year without the entry into force of the Treaty is a stark reminder that the promise and hope brought by the Treaty has yet to become reality.

53. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty’s entry into force, and until then the continuation of the existing moratoriums on nuclear tests, are all the more imperative when one considers the contemporary threats to peace, from the continuing challenges of nuclear proliferation to the major modernization of nuclear weapons arsenals of some of the nuclear-weapon States. The Holy See stands ready to support all efforts to achieve its entry into force and its vital contribution to ensuring a nuclear-weapon-free world.

## **3. Nuclear-weapon-free zones**

54. These also play an important role in promoting regional and international peace and stability. They both complement and reinforce the Non-Proliferation Treaty, replacing the logic of fear and mistrust with an ethics of responsibility. Their existence and broad coverage are a powerful demonstration of the determination of States and their peoples’ desire for true peace. Of particular importance to the 2020 Review Conference will be renewed efforts to secure a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in accordance with previous General Assembly resolutions (35/147 of 1974, 45/52 of 1990, 50/66 of 1995) and Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference (1995, 2010) resolutions and decisions.

#### 4. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

55. The conviction that a world free of nuclear weapons is both “possible and necessary” is encouraged and reinforced by the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, whose objectives are also embodied in the spirit of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The “Humanitarian Initiative” movement that led to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was an effort driven by a growing group of States and civil society, to fundamentally reframe the discussion around nuclear weapons in order to allow progress to be made towards disarmament. Since the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the Non-Proliferation Treaty are driven by the same noble objectives, they mutually reinforce and complement each other. States that are not yet parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons may seek ways of constructive engagement with it and explore ways of cooperation on issues, such as victim assistance and environmental remediation (article 6). Having signed and ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Holy See, bearing in mind its obligation under article 12, believes that it is also in the interest of all States, parties and not-yet parties, to join forces to develop a sound “competent international authority or authorities” as called for by Article 4 (6) of the Treaty. It is of the utmost importance to strengthen the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons with rigorous provisions on verification.

#### 5. Nuclear risk-reduction

56. Hostility and distrust have also increased today among major powers. Therefore, a successful Review Conference would be especially beneficial when we consider that urgent action is needed to reduce nuclear risks and any dangers of accident, miscalculation or escalation of a conventional conflict to nuclear war. The Holy See welcomes and supports the various nuclear risk-reduction measures,<sup>30</sup> with the understanding that such measures are not an end in themselves that preserve and legitimize the status quo, but that they are aimed towards disarmament.

57. No single policy move will contribute more to an improvement in international relations than an agreement on even the most modest step in the direction of disarmament. In that regard, nuclear risk-reduction measures also underscore that we are all one human family.

#### 6. Promotion of transparency and verification under the “trust but verify” motto

58. To achieve a world without nuclear weapons, rigorous verification and compliance measures are needed, requiring cooperation. This is the common responsibility of all States. Structures like the International Atomic Energy Agency will be needed and must be strengthened, but also other verification initiatives are to be appreciated. It is important that such initiatives on verification bear fruits. In this regard, it is worthwhile to make use of the opportunities offered by new technologies to enhance reliable verification. The work of verification, besides being an incredibly valuable confidence-building measure, is a fundamental component in ensuring the efficacy of treaties under the well-known adage, “trust but verify”. In order to avoid nuclear proliferation risks, there is great need for appropriate IAEA standards for safeguards, transparency, verification and accountancy to assure that nuclear

<sup>30</sup> For example, encouraging a no-first-use pledge, reiterating the Reagan-Gorbachev statement that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”, finding agreement on establishing overall limits on a State’s weapons and delivery systems, responding to nuclear threats primarily by adequate conventional means in order not to provoke nuclear escalation, and renewing certain threat reduction and crisis management initiatives undertaken during the post-cold war era, including threat reductions centres, hotlines, crisis management protocols, military-to-military exchanges and efforts to prevent the theft of fissile materials.

technological developments and raw material transfers among States are not diverted to nuclear weapons.<sup>31</sup> More generally, States must refrain from decisions or strategies aimed at fostering any form of “vertical proliferation” (expansion and modernization of nuclear arsenals) or “horizontal proliferation” (geographical spread of nuclear risks) of nuclear weapons, carriers and vectors and that can represent harmful precedents.

## **7. Restoration of the firebreak between conventional and nuclear weapons, including the exclusion of dual-use weapons**

59. Renewed respect for the firebreak on the part of the nuclear-armed States has the potential to reduce the risk of nuclear war and establish firmer conditions for nuclear arms control and disarmament. Three steps would build the firebreak into today’s nuclear rivalries: (a) preventing the development or deployment of low-yield and dual-use weapons such as submarine-launched cruise missiles; (b) joint adoption of a deterrent/no-first-use declaratory policies; and (c) adherence to a now customary international law norm against the use of nuclear weapons.

## **8. Steps to re-establish the arms control regime**

60. The legal architecture of nuclear disarmament is like a mosaic whose pieces are the different components of the international nuclear apparatus: the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the negotiation towards the treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, the nuclear-weapon-free zones, the IAEA safeguards agreements and bilateral agreements like the New START Treaty. Some of the instruments of international nuclear arms control have either not entered into force or are not being implemented consistently. Others have been abandoned or allowed to expire.

61. Of particular importance would be the establishment of an intermediate nuclear forces agreement, the reactivation of the Treaty on Open Skies – a reassurance for non-nuclear-weapon States – and initiation of negotiations towards prohibition of armed combat in outer space. To overcome the dynamic of suspicion and mistrust attending the collapse of the arms control regime and in order to counter pressures against multilateral agreements, all parties should cultivate a spirit of dialogue.

## **9. Education for peace and development**

62. Disarmament cannot be achieved if international relations are not based on mutual trust and cooperation. It is important that people, especially the youth, are educated to become peacemakers; it is imperative that peace studies be even more developed, and that disarmament be given more impetus.

63. Previous Review Conferences have underscored the importance of disarmament and non-proliferation education as a useful and effective means to advance the goals of the Treaty in support of achieving a world without nuclear weapons. Along with the scientific technical community, religions can play an influential role in helping to raise public awareness of the nuclear threat, as well as of the quest for integral security, by collaborating across national boundaries.

64. In this perspective, religions are also important for raising awareness of the risks and consequences of nuclear weapons for current and future generations. In this regard, the Holy See will step up its engagement and encourages all educational institutions, especially the many Catholic ones (national bishops’ conferences,

<sup>31</sup> Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency, articles II, III.A.5 and XII.A.5.

Catholic universities, etc.), to be more active in creating a culture of peace and a culture of care, thereby helping to make nuclear disarmament a reality.

65. The Holy See also supports technical cooperation in the nuclear sciences and their applications, advancing the peaceful use of nuclear technologies in the fields of human health, water and environment, climate change, food security and smart agriculture.

## 10. Creation of a global fund

66. To recall the need for a much stronger and more cooperative approach to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament, the Holy See wishes to reaffirm the proposal for the establishment of “a global fund”, as first urged by Pope Saint Paul VI, “to assist those most impoverished peoples, drawn partially from military expenditures”.<sup>32</sup> In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis appeals: “With the money spent on weapons and other military expenditures, let us establish a global fund that can finally put an end to hunger and favour development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent or illusory solutions, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life”.<sup>33</sup> This fund is a contemporary and much-needed expression of “turning swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks”,<sup>34</sup> echoing the words of the Prophet Isaiah, inscribed across the street from the entrance to the United Nations, words which could not be more relevant today, when food insecurity is affecting several million people.<sup>35</sup>

## V. Conclusions

67. “Today, it is difficult to think with the logic of peace. We have got used to thinking with the logic of war. [...] War has in fact been prepared for some time by great investments in weaponry and a massive trade in arms. It is distressing to see how the enthusiasm for peace, which emerged after the Second World War, has faded in these recent decades, as has the progress of the international community, with a few powers that go ahead on their own account, seeking spaces and zones of influence. In this way, not only peace, but also so many great questions, like the fight against hunger and inequality, are no longer on the list of the main political agendas”.<sup>36</sup>

68. Nuclear weapons remain a global problem. They affect not just nuclear-armed States, but other non-nuclear signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, non-signatories, unacknowledged possessing States and allies under “the nuclear umbrella.” They also impact future generations and the planet that is our home. The reduction of the nuclear threat and disarmament require a global ethic. Now, more than ever, the facts of technological and political interdependence cry out for an ethic

<sup>32</sup> Saint Paul VI, encyclical letter “*Populorum Progressio*: On the Development of Peoples”, n. 51, 26 March 1967.

<sup>33</sup> “*Fratelli Tutti*”, para. 262.

<sup>34</sup> Isaiah 2:4.

<sup>35</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme and World Health Organization, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021: Transforming Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diets for All* (Rome, FAO, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps”, Malta, 2 April 2022.

of solidarity in which we work with one another for a less dangerous, morally responsible global future.<sup>37</sup>

69. Our existing disarmament treaties are more than just legal obligations. They are also moral commitments based on trust between States and their representatives and they are rooted in the trust that citizens place in their Governments, with moral stakes for the whole of humanity, including future generations.

70. Guided by the conviction that a world free of nuclear weapons is both possible and necessary, the Holy See encourages all States parties to adopt a renewed conviction of urgency and commitment to achieve concrete and durable agreements towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in the spirit and letter of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. These are, after all, the same objectives solemnly declared in the preamble of the Treaty.

71. In particular, it is now time to question the distinction between possession and use of nuclear weapons. One of the deepest longings of the human heart is for security, peace and stability. The possession of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction is not the answer to this desire; indeed, these weapons seem always to thwart it. Trying to defend and ensure stability and peace through a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust inevitably ends up poisoning relationships between peoples and obstructing any form of dialogue.

72. Confronted with the many security challenges, outlined above, that the international community is facing, there is no room for further lack of progress in implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In order to reassert its pertinence and value, States parties must recognize that certain issues should transcend narrow individual interests and agenda by virtue of their contribution to the common good. Our most important task is to avoid episodes of self-destruction by nuclear war. For our survival and well-being, for the sake of our children and generations to come, we must create a world of solidarity, fraternity and justice in which the dignity and rights of all are assured. Tomorrow may be too late.

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<sup>37</sup> “Nuclear weapons: time for abolition”, document presented by the Holy See at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, 8 December 2014.