



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

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Nagasaki Prefecture Conference of Religious Leaders  
August 7, 2023, Nagasaki, Japan

Archbishop Etienne and I are deeply honored to be with you today to discuss the need for interfaith leaders to help lead the world toward global, verifiable nuclear disarmament. My talk centers on why we must act. The reason is quite simple. Somebody has to do it, and our international political leadership is failing to do so.

Nuclear disarmament is a pro-life issue that seeks to save the human family from the one existential threat that could end civilization overnight. The horrific destruction that this fair City of Nagasaki experienced on August 9, 1945, is sadly only a foretaste of the horror that would be experienced in a full nuclear war between Russia and the United States. And, as you know, the chances of potential nuclear war are not as remote as they use to be.

All out nuclear war would cause the deaths of some 5 billion human beings because of nuclear winter. This is an abomination against God's creation. The nuclear weapons states have failed to disclose this fact - - instead, it had to be demonstrated by independent scientists. That alone is revealing.

Atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons ended in 1962. But the governments of the nuclear weapons states have yet to disclose that most cancer deaths from testing are yet to come. Independent research has concluded that future deaths could be as high as 3.7 million fatalities due to long-lived carbon-14. Think about the noticeable rise of all types of cancers in your family and friends during your own lifetime. One has to wonder - - are all these cancer deaths the true legacy of the global nuclear weapons industry? Why aren't our governments telling us about it?

Today, the world has slept walked into a new nuclear arms race, arguably more dangerous than the first. We are at higher risk because we are dealing with multiple nuclear actors and the rise of cyber threats, hypersonic weapons and artificial intelligence. Robert McNamara, U.S. Defense Secretary during the Cuban Missile Crisis, said we had survived only by luck. Luck is not a sustainable strategy for the survival of the human race. Unless prodded by us, political leadership will just maintain the nuclear status quo, which is Armageddon waiting to happen. Only religious leaders around the world have the moral authority to say this is not acceptable. This is why we must act.

In May, Archbishop Paul Etienne and I joined Archbishop Peter Nakamura of Nagasaki and Bishop Alexis Shirahama of Hiroshima to send a letter to the world leaders at the G7 summit in Hiroshima. We noted that the Santa Fe Archdiocese has the most spending on nuclear weapons research and production in the United States. The Seattle Archdiocese has the most deployed nuclear weapons in the United States. The dioceses of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the only two dioceses in the world to have suffered atomic attacks. We were therefore joined together by providence to speak out.

We called upon the G7 leaders to take concrete steps toward nuclear disarmament. We added that "Rather than viewing the war in Ukraine as an overwhelming impediment toward making substantial progress, we view it instead as a clear demonstration of the absolute need to do so." We called upon world leaders to begin negotiating nuclear disarmament, as pledged to so long ago in the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty, but never honored. Sadly, our message to the world leaders at the G7 meeting fell on deaf ears.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty is commonly referred to as the cornerstone of the world's nonproliferation regime. It went into effect in 1970, signed by 189 countries, more than any other treaty. Its grand bargain was that non-nuclear weapons states forswore the acquisition of nuclear weapons, in exchange for which "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes 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..."

More than a half century later, not only have none of the nuclear powers honored that solemn promise, but they have increasingly moved in the opposite direction by implementing massive "modernization" programs designed to keep their nuclear weapons forever.

Noting this lack of progress, in 2014 the Holy See declared:

If there is little or no progress toward disarmament by the nuclear states, it is inevitable that the [NonProliferation Treaty] will be regarded as an unjust perpetuation of the status quo. Only insofar as the nuclear-armed states move toward disarmament will the rest of the world regard the nonproliferation regime as just.

Since then, all Review Conferences of the Non-Proliferation Treaty have ended in failure, making no progress whatsoever toward nuclear disarmament. That is why the Vatican was the first to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. That is why we need to prod our governments to do the right thing.

On August 6, 2020, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nuclear attacks on Japan, Pope Francis called "for prayer and commitment to a world completely free of nuclear weapons." Much earlier, in 1984 President Ronald Reagan declared to Soviet leadership:

"There is only one sane policy, for your country and mine, to preserve our civilization in this modern age: A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The only value in our two nations possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then would it not be better to do away with them entirely?"

The only solution that ensures enduring global safety is the global, verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons that both President Reagan and Pope Francis have directed us toward.

So, what are we to do? I can only answer by providing the example of what I hope to do.

My first step, while here with my brother Archbishop Etienne, is to explore with Archbishop Nakamura and Bishop Shirahama the possibility of forming formal sister relationships with the

dioceses of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We seek to build an enduring platform to collectively work on nuclear disarmament.

Second, in late November I plan to travel to the United Nations in New York City to witness the second meeting of the State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. I encourage any and all interfaith leaders to do so as well. Our growing presence will exert more pressure on the nuclear weapons states to eventually honor the ban treaty, just as they have for earlier treaties banning chemical and biological weapons.

Finally, I am urging the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to adopt the issue of nuclear disarmament as a pro-life issue, consistent with the Vatican's ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. After all, how can it not be a critical pro-life issue to ban the only weapons that could end human civilization overnight?

To my Japanese brothers and sisters, I respectfully suggest that citizens continue to speak out against the possibility that Japan might acquire its own nuclear weapons. Your country should also find a safe, non-proliferating way to dispose of plutonium. And finally, the Japanese public should press their national political leadership to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, as the Vatican has done.

Through all of this, our dialogue and discussions should be respectful, rooted in prayer, based on nonviolence, and centered in the hope and belief that nuclear disarmament is achievable. We can do this, and with the God of peace within us, we can do this soon!

But it is not enough that we become instruments of peace, as important as that is. No, we must take up the cause of worldwide nuclear disarmament with an urgency that befits the seriousness of this cause and the dangerous threat that looms over all of humanity and the planet. I call upon all of us to take up the challenge of nuclear disarmament by engaging in the vital discussion and work that will lead to concrete action steps toward this noble goal.

Thank you brothers and sisters in faith!

Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe  
August 5, 2023, from the World Peace Memorial Cathedral of Hiroshima, Japan

Recommended reading: Pastoral Letter: *Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament*, Archbishop John C. Wester, January 2022,  
<https://archdiosf.org/living-in-the-light-of-christs-peace>  
Translations in Japanese, Korean and Spanish are also available at that same link.