

Catholic Morality and Nuclear Abolition

In December 2014, His Holiness Pope Francis sent an [important message](#)¹ to the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. He wrote in part, *“I am convinced that the desire for peace and fraternity planted deep in the human heart will bear fruit in concrete ways to ensure that nuclear weapons are banned once and for all, to the benefit of our common home.”*

During the same conference, the Holy See contributed a ground-breaking paper, [Nuclear Disarmament: Time for Abolition](#)², which presents a compelling argument to move beyond limits set by political realism: *“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.”*

Nuclear weapons have plagued humanity for seventy years. Designed to terrify as well as to destroy, these weapons can, in the hands of either states or terrorists, cause indiscriminate harm to humans and the earth - to the global common good - on a scale that is unthinkable and likely to persist for generations. The use of nuclear weapons has long been strictly prohibited by Catholic teaching. Now, the Holy See has said, *“the very possession of nuclear weapons, even for the purposes of deterrence is morally problematic.”*

As Catholic theologians, ethicists, and leaders of Catholic communities and organizations across the United States, we agree. No justification, whether national security, stability in international power relations, or the difficulty of overcoming political inertia, exists that would allow the continued existence of nuclear weapons, much less their use.

Furthermore, all nuclear weapons possessors, including the United States, are in the process of modernizing their arsenals, investing billions to ensure that they remain ready for use. These funds and tremendous human talent are wrongly diverted from meeting true human security goals and from protecting the integrity of creation.

Continued reliance on nuclear weapons is an affront to human dignity and the sacredness of life. Yet, nuclear weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction not prohibited by an international convention, even though they have the greatest destructive capacity of all weapons. A ban would not only make it illegal for nations to use or possess nuclear weapons; it would also help pave the way to their complete elimination, strengthening existing non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.

¹ MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS ON THE OCCASION OF THE VIENNA CONFERENCE ON THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, issued 7 December 2014: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141207_messaggio-conferenza-vienna-nucleare.html

² NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT: TIME FOR ABOLITION, issued 8 December 2014: <http://www.fciv.org/downloads/Holy%20See%20Contribution-Vienna-8-DEC-2014.pdf>

At the Vienna conference, the Austrian government pledged to cooperate with all stakeholders "to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons."³ Many other nations have since expressed support for the Austrian pledge.

We too welcome movement toward a nuclear ban treaty as a way to reject nuclear weapons once and for all through a legal instrument and to reaffirm unequivocally human dignity and our obligation to respect the integrity of creation by rejecting the most indiscriminate, inhumane weapon ever created.

We urge U.S. political decision-makers who are charged with the heavy responsibility for U.S. nuclear weapons policy to remember, in the words of the Holy See, that "the commitment to disarm embedded in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and other international documents is more than a legal-political detail, it is a moral commitment on which the future of the world depends."⁴

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³ Austrian Pledge, issued 9 December 2014:

http://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Abroestung/HINW14/HINW14_Austrian_Pledge.pdf

⁴ NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT: TIME FOR ABOLITION, issued 8 December 2014:

<http://www.fciv.org/downloads/Holy%20See%20Contribution-Vienna-8-DEC-2014.pdf>