



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza
Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
at the High-level plenary meeting to commemorate and promote
The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons
New York, 26 September 2016

Mr. President,

The Holy See fervently hopes that this annual commemoration of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons will contribute to breaking the deadlock that has beset the United Nations' disarmament machinery for far too long now.

In February 1943, two years and a half before the Trinity test, Pope Pius XII had already voiced deep concern regarding the violent use of atomic energy. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki and given the totally uncontrollable and indiscriminate consequences of nuclear weapons, Pope Pius XII demanded the effective proscription and banishment of atomic warfare, calling the arms race a costly relationship of mutual terror. The Holy See has maintained this position ever since the advent of nuclear weapons.

My delegation believes that nuclear arms offer a false sense of security, and that the uneasy peace promised by nuclear deterrence is a tragic illusion. Nuclear weapons cannot create for us a stable and secure world. Peace and international stability cannot be founded on mutually assured destruction or on the threat of total annihilation. The Holy See believes that peace cannot be solely the maintaining of a balance of power. On the contrary, as Pope Francis affirmed, "Peace must be built on justice, socio-economic development, freedom, respect for human rights, the participation of all in public affairs and the building of trust between peoples."¹ Lasting peace thus requires that all must strive for progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament.

The Holy See has been a Party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) since the very beginning, in order to encourage nuclear possessing States to abolish their nuclear weapons, to dissuade non-nuclear possessing States from acquiring or developing nuclear capabilities, and to encourage international cooperation on the peaceful uses of nuclear material. While firmly believing that the NPT remains vital to international peace and security and regretting deeply our collective failure to move forward with a positive disarmament agenda, the Holy See will continue to argue against both the possession and the use of nuclear weapons, until the total elimination of nuclear weapons is achieved.

¹ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the occasion of the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, December 2014.

Indeed, the Holy See considers it a moral and humanitarian imperative to advance the efforts towards the final objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Disarmament treaties are not just legal obligations; they are also moral commitments based on trust between States, rooted in the trust that citizens place in their governments. If commitments to nuclear disarmament are not made in good faith and consequently result in breaches of trust, the proliferation of such weapons would be the logical corollary.

For our own good and that of future generations, we have no reasonable or moral option other than the abolition of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are a global problem and they impact all countries and all peoples, including future generations. Increasing interdependence and globalization demand that whatever response we make to the threat of nuclear weapons be collective and concerted, based on reciprocal trust, and within a framework of general and complete disarmament, as Art. VI of the NPT demands. Moreover, there is the real and present danger that nuclear weapons and other arms of mass destruction would fall into the hands of extremist terrorist groups and other violent non-state actors.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls upon all of us to embark on the implementation of the daunting ambition to better every life, especially those who have been and are left behind. It would be naïve and myopic if we sought to assure world peace and security through nuclear weapons rather than through the eradication of extreme poverty, increased accessibility to healthcare and education, and the promotion of peaceful institutions and societies through dialogue and solidarity.

Mr. President,

No one could ever say that a world without nuclear weapons is easily achievable. It is not; it is extremely arduous; to some, it may even appear utopian. But there is no alternative than to work unceasingly towards its achievement.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the conviction that Pope Francis expressed in his December 2014 message to the President of the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons: “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.”