

# Statement: Nuclear Weapons Ban Negotiations - Four Calls to Governments for a Human-Centered Treaty

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Pax Christi International welcomes the UN General Assembly's decision to negotiate a legally binding prohibition of nuclear weapons. We consider it a milestone that nuclear weapons be explicitly banned by international treaty and see the treaty as an exercise in the moral values and global responsibilities required to build a more secure and sustainable world. Moreover, a nuclear weapon ban treaty should not be seen as a revolutionary step, but rather as the logical next step leading towards the near-universal goal of a world without nuclear weapons. It would also strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty by reinforcing the existing obligation to achieve nuclear disarmament. We call upon all governments to uphold their responsibilities and attend the nuclear weapons ban treaty negotiations in March and June/July 2017.

Nuclear weapons are instruments of ultimate violence. Our planet has no place for weapons of such terror and mass destruction. For anyone to possess them takes a toll on everyone's humanity. Their presence in an era of increasing interdependence is an affront to human dignity. Nuclear weapons are designed to cause catastrophic humanitarian consequences and their use, under any circumstances, is unjustifiable and unthinkable. The Catholic Church has been outspoken against the indiscriminate nature of nuclear weapons: "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation."<sup>[1]</sup>

To free the world of nuclear weapons is a global public good of the highest order and a responsibility of all states. Humanitarian imperatives drive these negotiations towards a clear and explicit prohibition of the most destructive weapon ever created. The requisite protection for people and the planet depends on a complete legal prohibition of nuclear weapons leading towards their total elimination. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of any intentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons is very real. The only way to eliminate such risk is to eliminate all nuclear weapons. Our movement thus calls upon governments to consider these human-centered parameters for the nuclear weapons ban treaty negotiations:

## **1. Develop a robust new legal instrument**

Our movement calls upon governments to make the treaty's core focus the prohibition of the possession and use of nuclear weapons with an obligation for elimination. In focusing on these core principles, the full range of related activities—such as development, deployment, production, testing, stockpiling, transfer, threat of use and assistance with these activities—must also be prohibited. These provisions must be unambiguous. An explicit and binding prohibition will not only outlaw and further stigmatize nuclear arms, it will also reinforce existing foundations for their eventual elimination.

## **2. Take responsibility as a majority of states**

Pax Christi International strongly affirms that all states and the peoples they represent have a stake in these negotiations. It is fitting, therefore, that the movement towards a ban treaty is an initiative of a majority of states, many of whom have renounced nuclear weapons and established Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zones. That majority is now assuming leadership to achieve a universal prohibition of nuclear weapons. International organisations and civil society networks stand with them. We call upon all governments to take an active part in the nuclear weapons ban treaty negotiations. The worldwide risks associated with nuclear weapons call to account the minority of states which possess, or rely on, nuclear weapons. Those states need to engage with the majority in good faith as the legal anomaly around this weapon of mass destruction is finally corrected.

## **3. Act on core human values and legally binding obligations**

There exists a legally binding obligation 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".<sup>[2]</sup> Some

states which do not have their own nuclear weapons are members of nuclear alliances or in other ways rely on nuclear weapons. They avow support for eliminating nuclear weapons but continue to rely on nuclear weapons. Our movement believes that a ban treaty, which is an instrument of collective security for all, offers a pathway for them to align their obligations with their aspirations. Pax Christi International calls nuclear-dependent states to act on their core human values, affirming rather than abstaining from the ban, and to engage constructively and in good faith in the negotiations.

#### **4. Ban nuclear weapons for a sustainable future**

Banning nuclear weapons now is a test of international commitment to a sustainable future in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A Chatham House study in 2016 noted that “nuclear weapons pose overwhelming dangers to global health, development, climate, social structures and human rights. The detonation of nuclear weapons would have disastrous immediate and long-term consequences both in the location of the detonation and also in many other parts of the world.”<sup>[3]</sup> Pax Christi International therefore urges states to contribute to the SDGs at this critical juncture in human history by banning nuclear weapons.

In the words of Pope Francis on the occasion of the 2014 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. 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.”<sup>[4]</sup>

*Pax Christi International is a Catholic and faith-based peace movement with 120 member organisations worldwide promoting peace, respect for human rights, justice and reconciliation.*

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[1] Gaudium et Spes, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," Second Vatican Council

[2] Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Article VI

[3] Chatham House, *Nuclear Disarmament: The Missing Link in Multilateralism*, online available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/nuclear-disarmament-missing-link-multilateralism>

[4] The declaration of the Pope is available on this website: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141207\\_messaggio-conferenza-vienna-nucleare.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141207_messaggio-conferenza-vienna-nucleare.html)