

**Nuclear Weapons**  
**Confronting Armageddon**

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***The Vatican***

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- 1- It is an honor to take part in this conference, a laudable initiative by the Vatican. Nuclear weapons are the most urgent threat facing humanity today, and the risk of their use is higher than any time in the recent past. There is a growing mindset of *Cartago Deland Est.* It reveals itself in senseless and dehumanizing conflicts; in horrific terrorism; in Intangible walls between cultures and people; in an atmosphere of fear and exclusion; and of chest beating by nuclear weapon states. The urgent question on many people's mind is naturally how we can avert war and self-annihilation. I will first paint a broad picture of our world as I see it as a necessary backdrop to the discussion of the current status of nuclear weapons.
- 2- Our quest for Peace has always been elusive. Wars have dominated the human timeline since recorded history. Hundreds of millions have lost their lives to violence perpetuated under the guise of religion, nationalism, ethnicity and other alleged *casus belli*. We organized ourselves in social units of city-states, empires and sovereign states. We had the Peace of Westphalia, the Congress of Vienna, the League of Nations and the United Nations to regulate international relations. We created security systems based on balance of power and later on collective security. But peace has remained fleeting and fragile with force

and violence continuing to be our primary choice to settle differences.

- 3- Our human condition of late has become more absurd and contradictory: we have made a huge leap forward in the way we understand our world and ourselves. But at the same time we have failed dismally to translate these advances into values and actions to uphold human dignity. We are simultaneously showing every day without shame not only how high we can soar but also how low we can sink.
- 4- War, poverty and tyranny, and their assault on human dignity, aptly described by the American statesman Adlai Stevenson in the fifties as the “great enemies of man”, remain as shocking today. In the recent past, the international community has done little more than wring its hands while literally millions of innocent civilians were slaughtered in Rwanda, Congo, Darfur, Afghanistan, Syria and other places. We continue to judge the sanctity of life according to who is dying and where. And the response to humanitarian disasters is mostly informed by geostrategic interests.
- 5- Poverty and hunger, which although have decreased in the last two decades, continue at miserable levels; According to the World Bank, 767 million people live in extreme poverty on less than \$ 1.90 a day, and 2.1 billion people live on less than \$ 3.10 a day, the median poverty line. Millions die every year because of lack of access to medical care. And inequality in the distribution of wealth between and within countries has reached obscene levels.

- 6- Brutal repression continues to be the hallmark of a third of the world's nations. Uprisings against tyranny and injustice and in quest for human dignity continue, mostly in the Arab world and Africa. But the trampling of human rights by authoritarian regimes is becoming almost a spectator sport for the international community, limited mostly to cynical expressions of "deep concern". All the options used to counter tyranny: regime change, dumb sanctions or "embracing" the despots and arming them to the teeth, have only added to rising extremism and decaying values.
- 7- Poverty, inequality and repression are the most lethal weapons of mass destruction. The plight of the poor, deprived of the most basic needs; the predicament of the millions of young people with dashed hopes; the despair of the tortured and oppressed create a poisonous environment of anger and humiliation, and a fertile breeding ground for extremism and nihilism.
- 8- Violence and radicalism continue to manifest themselves wearing different masks of ideology, religion, ethnicity or nationalism to justify the most heinous acts. And in many cases conflicts are hijacked by outside powers looking for geopolitical gains in proxy wars. But it is the innocent civilians who foot the bill in the end, callously described as 'collateral damage'.
- 9- Last year the number of refugees forced to flee their homes as a result of violence and war, reached an estimated sixty five million people, over twenty one million of whom were forced to flee their country altogether. The global response to the refugee crises continues to be wretched. Obviously the solution to the

refugee crisis is not through a population transfer. But we need to address the roots of the problem; persecution, repression, poverty, extremism, and war. And even at the level of humanitarian assistance, international humanitarian organizations continue to almost beg to secure the minimum resources to provide the absolute basic needs. This travesty is not because we are short of money; it is a result of our skewed priorities. We only devote around one percent of the \$ 1.7 trillion we spend on armaments per year to disaster relief and peace keeping operations combined.

10- In our interlocked world our most ominous threats have no borders: terrorism, climate change, weapons of mass destruction, communicable diseases, cybercrime, illegal immigration and illicit drugs. Our actions or non-actions eventually come back to haunt us wherever we are. No part of the world can remain quarantined any longer.

11- We are facing an outright crisis of governance: governments which pursue short-term myopic policies, both informed and hamstrung by party politics, which fail to cope with people's expectations or meet new long-term global challenges. As a result, populism is on the rise and social cohesion is fraying. There is a pull and push in conflicting directions; movements to integrate into larger social units, but also movements to split into smaller ones. The tension between the national and the global is distinctly palpable.

12- At the international level, international institutions suffer from structural deficiencies and lack of authority and resources.

They are steadily becoming polarized and paralyzed. The chronic failure of the UN Security Council to take the necessary preventive measures or provide consistent and adequate responses to threats to international peace and security is a stark case in point, a symbol of a dysfunctional system of collective security.

13- Against this background, the reliance on nuclear weapons as the center piece of our collective security system is horrifying. The argument that nuclear weapons have kept the peace is bogus and does not withstand scrutiny. A peace that hangs on a doctrine of “Mutual Assured Destruction”; is based on the anachronistic premise that “some are more equal than others”; is underpinned by human fallibility, and, in addition, irrelevant to extremists. It is a peace that is unsustainable and highly perilous. The reality is that we continue to live under Damocles’ sword of sleep walking into apocalypse.

14- The truth is that the very existence of nuclear weapons bears the seeds of their proliferation, because they continue to be seen as the ultimate security deterrence and a major source of global influence. That some countries possess them, or are protected by them within an alliance, while others are asked not to have them, is oxymoronic in the long term. As I mentioned before, you cannot credibly ask a person not to smoke, while you are dangling a cigarette from your mouth. With the technology out of the box, we should not be surprised if other countries, particularly in areas of conflict, will seek to acquire them to mimic the “big boys”. Some have the capability to churn up nuclear weapons in matter of months. Recent history should be our guide.

But more ominously, how long will it take before a terrorist group with no return address lays its hands on a nuclear weapon or a dirty bomb.

15- Almost all prominent statesmen, have argued forcefully that reliance on nuclear weapons is becoming “increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective”. In 2011 former US secretary of defense Bill Perry talked about three false alarms he knew of, in which Soviet missiles were thought to be screaming towards the US. He added “To this day I believe that we avoided nuclear catastrophe as much by good luck as by good management”. In 2008 senator Sam Nunn, a leading US defense expert stated “I believe that America would be far more secure if no one had nuclear weapons”. Former US defense secretary Robert McNamara, a onetime staunch supporter of nuclear weapons, put it in blunter terms: “the indefinite combination of human fallibility and nuclear weapons will lead to the destruction of nations” This led him to the conclusion that “The only way to eliminate the risk is to eliminate nuclear weapons”.

16- But with all these warnings and many others from different parts of the world, have we seriously started to take meaningful steps to get rid of nuclear weapons? Have we seriously tried to drastically reduce the number of weapons in existence? Have we seriously tried to alter the nuclear launch warning system, the so called “prompt Launch” where a US or a Russian president has a mere seven to eight minutes to respond to a “reported” nuclear attack, with the odds of miscalculation increasing exponentially as a result of cyber manipulation? Have we seriously tried to reduce

our reliance on nuclear weapons in national security strategies? And have we seriously started thinking about the security architecture in a nuclear weapon free world?

17- It borders on insanity that, more than a quarter of a century after the end of the cold war, we still have almost 15000 nuclear weapons, around 2000 of which are still on high alert. Churchill chuckled way back that “If you go on with this nuclear arms race, all you are going to do is make the rubble bounce”

18- Under the treaty of the Non- Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) the so-called five Weapon States party not only have an obligation to negotiate in good faith towards nuclear disarmament , but equally, in the words of the International Court of Justice “ the obligation to achieve a precise result : nuclear disarmament in all its aspects”.

19- However, after almost five decades, the nuclear weapon states are moving in the completely opposite direction. They are modernizing their arsenals to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars. Some of them cannot even commit to a ban on nuclear testing. As a result The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test- Ban Treaty (CTBT), concluded in 1996, is yet to enter into force. And for the last twenty years, the proposal to conclude a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty to prohibit the further production of fissile material for nuclear weapons has been dead in its tracks.

20- In 2003, as Director General of the IAEA, I called for a new approach to curb the proliferation of the sensitive parts of the fuel cycle, uranium enrichment and plutonium separation, by bringing it under international control. The recently inaugurated



LEU bank in Kazakhstan, owned and operated by the IAEA, is a step in the right direction. But true security regarding the fuel cycle can only come through the multilateralization of all uranium enrichment and plutonium separation facilities. This is regrettably yet again not being seriously discussed and not on the cards in the foreseeable future.

21- What is more distressing in addition, is that recent reports indicate that the US has increased the targeting and killing capability of its ballistic missile force, and therefore its capacity for a surprise attack to fight and win a nuclear war. Experts tell us this will only lead to the deepening of mistrust, the hardening of an already aggressive nuclear posture, and the increased possibility of a nuclear response to a false alarm. The entire landscape is frightening and shameful. It shows no genuine commitment whatsoever to nuclear disarmament. And it undermines overtime the legal and moral foundation of the nonproliferation regime.

22- The recently concluded Treaty on the prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted by 122 states (69 states did not vote) which prohibits the acquisition of nuclear weapons and asks the weapon states to shed their nuclear weapons, grew out of rising awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, as well as their constant threat to humanity and all life on earth. It was equally the result of the frustration at the snail's pace of nuclear disarmament. Its adoption was a logical step. The international community has already prohibited biological and chemical weapons, land mines

and cluster munitions, classes of weapons that are less destructive than nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons were therefore, until the conclusion of the new convention, a historical oddity.

23- Deplorably none of the weapon states adopted this convention. Instead, the US, UK, and France quickly declared that they “do not intend to ever become party” because the convention “is incompatible with the policy of nuclear deterrence, which has been essential to keeping the peace in Europe and North Asia for over 70 years.” But isn’t this precisely the policy of nuclear deterrence that the NPT aimed to abolish, when it obligated the weapon states to negotiate *in good faith* towards nuclear disarmament? And wasn’t that obligation an essential part of the “bargain” so to speak, under which all other states agreed not to acquire nuclear weapons?

24- Other NATO members and close allies of the weapon states also rejected the idea of the convention and did not participate in its adoption. They argued that it would be ineffective in eliminating nuclear weapons and could adversely affect regional and global security. But there are a few questions here: Is the obligation *in good faith* to achieve nuclear disarmament, agreed almost fifty years ago, an open ended one with no time limit? Doesn’t the prohibition of nuclear weapons, as a step towards their elimination, strengthen the overarching goal of the NPT? And wasn’t that the path followed to eliminate other weapons of mass destruction; prohibit and eliminate? And finally, how about the security of those who do not have nuclear weapons or benefit

from their protection? And does their security or insecurity count?

25- To my mind, the reaction of the weapon states and their allies is a lopsided, if not condescending, view of “collective” security. One would have expected the weapon states and those in their camps to at least, in the words of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, “initiate serious negotiations with a view to the gradual, balanced, and carefully monitored elimination” of nuclear weapons, rather than this negative reaction. I still very much hope that the views of the weapon states will evolve in that direction over time. A sharp global division over the very core of collective security is dangerous to all.

26- Every state, irrespective of the nature or orientation of its regime, will do all it can to protect itself against perceived threats and insecurity. We must therefore urgently work for an equitable, inclusive and reliable system of security. In such a system, weapons of mass destruction cannot have a place.

27- War, poverty, and tyranny, our perpetual enemies, are of our own making. They are the outcome of an environment we have constructed and a mindset we have cultivated. They all lead to the loss of human dignity, which, in turn continues to fuel them. This vicious circle must be broken. We need a new global paradigm where we genuinely subscribe to the values we often reference but rarely pursue: sanctity of life, equity, inclusiveness and diversity, solidarity and dialogue; rather than double standards, polarization, humiliation, exclusion and use of force.

28- The challenges we all face are bigger than any single country, conflict or issue, and none of us can or will prevail alone. We will either swim together or sink together. Somehow we have lost our way. It is time to adjust our mindset to save ourselves from ourselves.