HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
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BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO
SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 170328d

Tuesday 28.03.2017

Holy Father's Message to the United Nations Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons (New York, 27-31 March 2017)

The Holy Father Francis has sent a message to the "United Nations Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination", the first part of which is taking place in New York, United States of America, from 27 to 31 March 2017.

The aforementioned message was read by Msgr. Antoine Camilleri, undersecretary for Relations with States, Head of the Holy See delegation at the Conference.

The following is the full text of the message:

To Her Excellency Elayne Whyte Gómez
President of the United Nations Conference
to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument
to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons,
Leading Towards their Total Elimination

I extend cordial greetings to you, Madam President, and to all the representatives of the various nations and international organizations, and of civil society participating in this Conference. I wish to encourage you to work with determination in order to promote the conditions necessary for a world without nuclear weapons.

On 25 September 2015, before the General Assembly of the United Nations, I emphasized what the Preamble and first Article of the United Nations Charter indicate as the foundations of the international juridical framework: peace, the pacific solution of disputes and the development of friendly relations between nations. An ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction – and possibly the destruction of all mankind – are contradictory to the very spirit of the United Nations. We must therefore commit ourselves to a world without nuclear weapons, by fully implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty, both in letter and spirit (cf. *Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations*, 25 September 2015).

But why give ourselves this demanding and forward-looking goal in the present international context characterized by an unstable climate of conflict, which is both cause and indication of the difficulties encountered in advancing and strengthening the process of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation?

If we take into consideration the principal threats to peace and security with their many dimensions in this multipolar world of the twenty-first century as, for example, terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental problems, poverty, not a few doubts arise regarding the inadequacy of nuclear deterrence as an effective response to such challenges. These concerns are even greater when we consider the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences that would follow from any use of nuclear weapons, with devastating, indiscriminate and uncontainable effects, over time and space. Similar cause for concern arises when examining the waste of resources spent on nuclear issues for military purposes, which could instead be used for worthy priorities like the promotion of peace and integral human development, as well as the fight against poverty, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We need also to ask ourselves how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples.

International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power. Peace must be built on justice, on integral human development, on respect for fundamental human rights, on the protection of creation, on the participation of all in public life, on trust between peoples, on the support of peaceful institutions, on access to education and health, on dialogue and solidarity. From this perspective, we need to go beyond nuclear deterrence: the international community is called upon to adopt forward-looking strategies to promote the goal of peace and stability and to avoid short-sighted approaches to the problems surrounding national and international security.

In this context, the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative. A concrete approach should promote a reflection on an ethics of peace and multilateral and cooperative security that goes beyond the fear and isolationism that prevail in many debates today. Achieving a world without nuclear weapons involves a long-term process, based on the awareness that “everything is connected” within the perspective of an integral ecology (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 117, 138). The common destiny of mankind demands the pragmatic strengthening of dialogue and the building and consolidating of mechanisms of trust and cooperation, capable of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.

Growing interdependence and globalization mean that any response to the threat of nuclear weapons should be collective and concerted, based on mutual trust. This trust can be built only through dialogue that is truly directed to the common good and not to the protection of veiled or particular interests; such dialogue, as far as possible, should include all: nuclear states, countries which do not possess nuclear weapons, the military and private sectors, religious communities, civil societies, and international organizations. And in this endeavour we must avoid those forms of mutual recrimination and polarization which hinder dialogue rather than encourage it. Humanity has the ability to work together in building up our common home; we have the freedom, intelligence and capacity to lead and direct technology, to place limits on our power, and to put all this at the service of another type of progress: one that is more human, social and integral (cf. *ibid.*, 13, 78, 112; *Message for the 22nd Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Agreement on Climate Change (COP22)*, 10 November 2016).

This Conference intends to negotiate a Treaty inspired by ethical and moral arguments. It is an exercise in hope and it is my wish that it may also constitute a decisive step along the road towards a world without nuclear weapons. Although this is a significantly complex and long-term goal, it is not beyond our reach.

Madam President, I sincerely wish that the efforts of this Conference may be fruitful and provide an effective contribution to advancing an ethic of peace and of multilateral and cooperative security, which humanity very much needs today.

Upon all those gathered at this important meeting, and upon the citizens of the countries you represent, I invoke the blessings of the Almighty.

From the Vatican, 23 March 2017

FRANCIS