



**Message of the Holy Father Pope Francis
to His Excellency Ambassador Gustavo Zlauvinen
President of the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the
Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
(New York, 2 August 2022)**

*As read out by
Archbishop Gabriele Caccia,
Head of the Delegation of the Holy See
to the Tenth Review Conference*

Mr. President and Distinguished Representatives,

In preparation for this Tenth Review Conference, His Holiness Pope Francis addressed a message to Ambassador Zlauvinen in his capacity as President of this important conference. I am pleased to read out the papal message as the Holy See contribution to this general debate.

“Mr. President,

We recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Indeed, for half a century, the NPT has played a vital role in maintaining peace among nations and has succeeded in limiting nuclear proliferation.

Even so, the world faces several grave challenges in the fields of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Today represents both an opportunity and duty to reach consensus in this Review Conference on concrete actions in accordance with our joint goal to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons, which is both necessary and possible. This vision is shared and enshrined in the NPT, but it requires us to promote dialogue and move with determination from a perspective of *competition* to one of *cooperation*.

A world free of nuclear weapons demands, first of all, a strong commitment to nuclear disarmament. While welcoming the five-year extension of the New START Treaty, it is important to recognize that active negotiations to reduce nuclear weapons have not taken place since 2011, and that achieving further reductions remains very challenging. The Intermediate Nuclear

Forces Treaty has lapsed, and both the United States and the Russian Federation have withdrawn from the Treaty on Open Skies. Reliance on deterrence continues to drive possessor States to increase their nuclear capabilities, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 should in no way be interpreted as the tacit acceptance of the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons. We must move toward an agreed global ceiling, setting an upper limit from which nuclear arms can be reduced, thus advancing the cause of disarmament.

The war in Ukraine has also alerted the world to the heightened risk of a conventional armed conflict escalating to involve the use of nuclear weapons, representing another urgent reason to ensure action during this conference. To lessen the risk of inadvertent escalation, the Holy See urges States that possess nuclear weapons to take steps to decrease the operational readiness of their nuclear forces, and to decrease their nuclear arsenals, in line with commitments agreed upon at the 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences.

Mr. President,

The inertia in recent years has prompted many States to seek ways to accelerate the process of achieving a nuclear-weapon free world, based especially on the awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of their use.

As I noted during my 2019 visit to Hiroshima, “the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is today, more than ever, a crime not only against the dignity of human beings but against any possible future for our common home. The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral. ... Future generations will rise to condemn our failure if we spoke of peace but did not act to bring it about among the peoples of the earth.”¹

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is a concrete example of efforts to bring about a nuclear-weapon free world. This treaty, which the Holy See promptly signed and ratified, demonstrates our unwavering commitment to the total elimination of nuclear weapons and mutually reinforces the nuclear nonproliferation regime, especially Article

¹ Pope Francis, Address at the meeting at the Peace Memorial in Hiroshima, 24 November 2019.

VI of the NPT, which calls for “effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.”

The TPNW constitutes such an effective measure, which supports the NPT, especially in light of the Vienna Declaration adopted at the First Meeting of States Parties (1MSP) to the TPNW, which recognizes the NPT “as the cornerstone of the disarmament and nonproliferation regime”, deplores any threat or actions that might undermine the NPT, and reaffirms the complementarity of the TPNW and NPT.² The entry into force of the TPNW should encourage this Review Conference to advance progress on nuclear disarmament and further explore how the TPNW and NPT can mutually reinforce one another. Collaboration between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States in the areas of nuclear disarmament verification, environmental remediation, and victims assistance provides us with a practical opportunity to do this.

Mr. President,

The reduction of the nuclear threat requires a renewed global ethic. Disarmament treaties are more than legal obligations, they are moral commitments.

It is important to recognize a pressing need for responsibility, solidarity, and cooperative security, since “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, [a]ny response to the threat of nuclear weapons should be collective and concerted, based on mutual trust”³. Disarmament and non-proliferation education can play an important role in this endeavor, by raising awareness, especially among youth, of the risks and consequences of nuclear weapons for current and future generations.

We should ask ourselves what kind of security we want, and what are the most effective means to ensure such security. In the twenty-first century, security is threatened by phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, poverty, cybersecurity, and terrorism. Nuclear deterrence is

² Draft Vienna Declaration of the 1st Meeting of States Parties of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 23 June 2022, TPNW/MSP/2022/CRP.8.

³ Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti*, (2011) 262.

an inadequate response to these threats.⁴ Therefore, the international community is called to adopt forward-looking strategies to promote the goal of international peace and avoid shortsighted approaches to national and international security problems.

Even before the entry into force of the NPT, Pope Saint Paul VI was long a proponent of a global fund, established with the money otherwise spent on weapons and other military expenditures, with a view to putting an end to hunger and favor development in the most impoverished countries.⁵ The pressing, universal needs exacerbated by the pandemic, affecting all aspects of daily life and claiming the lives of millions, are surely a summons to expend our energies as well as to use our talents and resources to make good on our solemn commitments enshrined in the text of this Treaty and to build a safer world, where solidarity and trust are employed for the integral development of all people.

Please accept, Mr President, my cordial greetings and good wishes.

From the Vatican,

FRANCIS”

Thank you for your kind attention.

⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, Message to the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading Towards Their Total Elimination, 23 March 2017.

⁵ Cf. Pope St Paul, VI, Encyclical Letter, *Populorum Progressio*, (1967), 282.