

Get Rid of Nuclear Weapons through Disarmament, Legal Accountability and Good Faith

Position Statement of Pax Christi International

Potent Dangers for Humanity

1. The peoples and governments of the world face an urgent challenge dealing with the threat of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weaponry. Pax Christi, the International Catholic peace movement, with 95-member organisations active worldwide, has repeatedly and consistently called for disarmament of all weapons of mass destruction (WMD): nuclear, chemical and biological.¹ At the crossroads of technology, terrorism, geopolitical ambition and policies of pre-emption are new and potent dangers for humanity. Despite the end of the nuclear standoff of the Cold War era, nuclear weaponry once again looms menacingly over people across the world with catastrophic possibilities.

Global Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

2. Pax Christi member organisations are advocating the global abolition of nuclear weapons. Many of our member organisations,² dealing with the issue of nuclear weaponry in their own countries, are acting against the usage of these weapons and for the ongoing replacement of their delivery systems. Recently, in June 2006, Pax Christi UK, in their campaign against the renewal of Trident, made the following statement³: "Trident is immoral, illegal and ineffective for our age. Possession and threatened use of such weapons of mass destruction is an affront to life and a gross misuse of power and status in a fragile world. Nuclear weapons have not and will not bring us security, rather the opposite: they are likely to cause animosity and resentment." Earlier, in January 2006, Pax Christi France questioned French President Jacques Chirac's suggestion that nuclear weapons could be used against a state responsible for a large-scale terrorist attack on France.⁴

3. In April 2005, Pax Christi International issued a statement on the occasion of the 2005 Non Proliferation Treaty Review Conference at the UN in New York.⁵ In that statement, Pax Christi International reaffirmed its position that it is immoral for states and non-state actors, including terrorists, to use, threaten with or possess nuclear weapons. At the same time, Pax Christi International reminded participants at the NPT meetings of their legal obligation to achieve complete and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons and to honour the promises they

¹ Pax Christi International - www.paxchristi.net - search for "disarmament."

² Pax Christi USA – www.paxchristiusa.org

³ 18 June 2006, read statement in DIS.32.E.06, or at www.paxchristi.org.uk.

⁴ 25 January 2006, read in French DIS.04.F.06 or at www.paxchristi.cef.fr/

⁵ 27 April 2005, read in English, French and Spanish DIS.22.EFS.05.

made at the NPT Review Conference in 2000 to strengthen the Non Proliferation Treaty and regime.

A World Free of Weapons of Terror

4. In June 2006, Hans Blix, the head of the Independent Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, released a report, “Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms.” Taking issue with the message of the US government that nuclear weapons are unacceptable in the hands of rogue states and terrorists, the Blix report rightly states that these catastrophic devices are dangerous in anyone’s hands. It explains that the problems of existing arsenals, potential spread, and potential terrorist use are all linked, and that they can be solved by a comprehensive approach leading to elimination of all nuclear weapons. H. Blix is seeking support from civil society, political and religious authorities. On 14 June 2006 in Rome, Blix presented Pope Benedict XVI with a copy of the report. On 15 June, the report was presented at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Both the Catholic Church and the WCC have regularly and consistently pleaded for complete nuclear disarmament. In January of this year, Pope Benedict XVI stated clearly “In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims.” He called on those countries in possession of nuclear weapons to “strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament.” Pax Christi International fully supports these efforts of both the WCC and the Holy See. It agrees that more could be done- even by our movement- to mobilise Churches and Religions by becoming actors and prophets for peace and disarmament.

Act in Good Faith

5. The USA and the other nuclear weapon states have not fulfilled their obligations of “good faith” negotiations for nuclear disarmament under Article VI of the NPT of 1970 (extended indefinitely in 1995). The nuclear “haves” are obliged to abolish their arsenals. We point to the 1996 International Court of Justice advisory opinion that states: “There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.” We continue to demand that they carry out their Article VI commitments and remind them of the promise they made at the NPT Review Conference in 2000 to make “an unequivocal undertaking … to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.”

Preventive Military Action is Counter-Productive

6. A nuclear weapons programme in Iran would be immoral and illegal and would pose a threat to the regional security and stability in the Middle East. However, preventive military violence is also unfounded and illegal under international law, as well as politically counter-productive. While it is of doubtful use, as Pope Benedict XVI has implied, the *pre-emptive* use of force against an imminent threat may be licit under international law. But where there is no

immediate threat against international peace and security, *preventive* military violence is illegal and we reject it completely. Experience shows that threatening military violence can initiate an almost unstoppable escalating process that could only be reversed at the price of a great loss of credibility. Against Iran for instance, it would worsen the still growing crisis in the region and undermine international peace and stability.

7. Iran is party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, NPT⁶. According to reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran has failed, over an extended period of time, to uphold its treaty obligations under Extended Safeguard Agreements. Iran has the right, under Article IV of the NPT, to pursue a peaceful nuclear energy programme for civil use only. Iran must agree to inspections of its nuclear facilities to assure those concerned that there has been no diversion of nuclear materials for making weapons. Pax Christi International demands that Iran commit itself to refraining from future threats and to comply with all of its international legal obligations under the UN Charter and the NPT.

Double Standards

8. At the same time, we question the unequal treatment of Iran and North Korea in comparison to another country, Israel, which is thought to possess some 200 nuclear weapons. Israel became a nuclear weapons state by the early 1970s. A “double standard” between nuclear “haves” and “have-nots” is not acceptable. Pax Christi International calls for the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone⁷ for the entire Middle East (and other WMD-free zones, for instance the Korean peninsula) in which all nations in the region would be required to give up their nuclear weapons and open up their programmes to strict international inspections.

9. Also, the USA uses a double standard regarding nuclear export and nuclear safeguards. In March 2006 the U.S. reached a bilateral nuclear agreement, giving substantial nuclear support to India – one of the few states choosing to stay outside the NPT regime and, at the same time, illicitly converting a civilian programme to a military one. This agreement contradicts the rules of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG),⁸ as well as the basic deal under the NPT. If the USA is allowed to make an exception for India, why should China, for instance, not ask to make an exception for Pakistan?

10. The conflict with countries such as Iran, North Korea and possibly other states, should be solved by peaceful means only, such as dialogue, confidence building measures and negotiations. In the case of Iran, Pax Christi International supports the UN and those (European) nations that take the lead in pursuing a diplomatic solution. The support of Russia,

⁶ The NPT is the most widely adhered to treaty in the area of arms control and disarmament. Only four countries are not party to this treaty: India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea, and all have developed nuclear arsenals.

⁷ Such nuclear weapons-free zones have already been successfully established for Latin America, the South Pacific, Antarctica, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_Suppliers_Group

China, the EU and the Arab states is of vital importance in this respect. The US should be willing to complement this diplomatic work by pursuing direct negotiations with Iran.

Global nuclear weapons abolition under strict and effective international control is the only way to prevent their future use.

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