



**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE 67th GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY**

DELIVERED BY

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Madam President,

I have the honour of conveying to you, and to all the distinguished participants at this 67th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the best wishes and cordial greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis.

On behalf of the Delegation of the Holy See, I congratulate the Director General, as well as you, Madam President, and the members of the Board on your election by the General Conference. We express our gratitude to Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi and to the Secretariat for their dedicated work for the benefit of the whole IAEA family.

The Holy See also congratulates The Gambia and Capo Verde on becoming Member States of the IAEA.

Madam President,

The year since the last IAEA General Conference has been momentous. “Our world continues to be in the grip of a third world war fought piecemeal, and, in the tragic case of the conflict in Ukraine, not without the threat of recourse to nuclear weapons”.¹

Indeed, the work of the IAEA in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, in strengthening nuclear safety and security, and in making peaceful nuclear science and technology available to developing countries has never been more important.

In this regard, the Holy See recognizes the Agency’s vital contribution to creating a world free of nuclear weapons and preventing nuclear accidents.

Sixty years ago, Pope John XXIII published the Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* – Peace on Earth. It remains the polar star that points the way for those who, especially in the field of diplomacy, are committed to promoting dialogue between peoples and building peace between nations. Today, more than ever, we must heed Pope John’s prophetic admonition that, in light of the terrifying destructive force of modern weapons, “relations between States, as between individuals, must be regulated not by armed force, but in accordance with the principles of right reason: the principles, that is, of truth, justice and vigorous and sincere co-operation”².

Pope John noted the grave risk that a nuclear war could be started “by some chance and unforeseen circumstance” and stated that “Nuclear weapons must be banned”³. Pope Francis has repeatedly echoed the call for an end to nuclear weapons emphasizing that both the possession of nuclear weapons and the threat to use them should be firmly condemned. “Weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, create nothing but a false sense of security,” he said, “They cannot constitute the basis for peaceful coexistence between members of the human family, which must rather be inspired by an

¹ Pope Francis, Message to the Conference of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on “*Pacem in terris: War and Other Obstacles to Peace*”, 19 September 2023.

² Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in terris*, 11 April 1963, para 114.

³ Pope John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in terris*, 11 April 1963, para 110.

ethics of solidarity”⁴.

The Holy See has no doubt that a world free from nuclear weapons is both necessary and possible, “nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction represent a multiplier of risk that offers only an illusion of peace”⁵. For that reason, it signed and ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons with the aim of moving beyond nuclear deterrence to a world entirely free of nuclear weapons.

Madam President,

IAEA safeguards constitute an important tool in moving towards the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. They provide an essential contribution to peace and security and help to build a climate of confidence in place of mutual recriminations.

In that regard, the Holy See regrets that Iran ceased to implement its commitments under the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)* two years ago, seriously affecting the Agency’s verification and monitoring activities. We support the Agency’s continued engagement with Iran and welcome its reporting on Iran’s nuclear programme.

Similarly, the Holy See appreciates the continued and patient efforts of the international community to revive negotiations around the nuclear programme of the DPRK, which threatens the integrity of the non-proliferation regime.

In addition, the Holy See fully supports the IAEA’s efforts to ensure the safety of the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant. Never before has a country with such an important nuclear energy programme been a target of a military attack. Never before has a nuclear power plant been at the greatest risk of damage from military action and been repeatedly shut down. Never before has the IAEA had to deploy a team of experts to maintain a continuous watch over a nuclear power plant exposed to such high risks or been forced to work in such dangerous conditions. Sadly, the seven pillars of nuclear safety established by the IAEA have been repeatedly undermined.

Therefore, the Director General’s efforts to ensure safety and security at Zaporizhzhya and other Ukrainian facilities give us hope that meaningful change can be achieved, even in unprecedented situations such as this.

Madam President,

All countries have the moral responsibility to construct political and economic grounds for peace, in order to support integral human development and the authentic hopes of all Peoples, placing human dignity and the common good at the centre.

Indeed, “it has become increasingly evident that in the multipolar world of the twenty-first century, the pursuit of peace is closely related to the need for security and that [...] global security needs to be integral, capable of embracing issues including

⁴ Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the International Symposium on “Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament”, 10 November 2017.

⁵ Letter of Pope Francis to the Bishop of Hiroshima on the Occasion of the G7 Summit, 19 May 2023.

access to food and water, respect for the environment, health care, energy sources and the equitable distribution of the world's goods. An integral concept of security can serve to anchor multilateralism and international cooperation between government and nongovernment actors, on the basis of the profound interconnection between these issues, which makes it necessary to adopt, together, an approach of responsible multilateral cooperation”⁶.

In this regard, the Holy See supports the unique work of the IAEA in making peaceful nuclear technology available to developing countries to help improve the health, well-being and prosperity of their people. In this way, the Agency provides a valuable contribution to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

For example, the IAEA *Rays of Hope* initiative to improve access to radiotherapy for cancer patients and the *Atoms4NetZero* programme to help countries use nuclear energy in the transition to net zero are particularly noteworthy. Similarly, the IAEA works actively to mitigate the impact of climate change through programmes to monitor pollution and environmental changes to the ocean and ecosystems, counter greenhouse gas emissions from energy production and land use, and adapt to new climate realities including food and water shortages and ecosystem losses are of significant importance as well.

Indeed, all of these activities promote integral development, enhancing our stewardship of God's creation.

As Pope Francis has said, “the Holy See is committed to promoting [...] an educational process that favours a cultural model of development and sustainability based on fraternity and the alliance between the human being and the environment”⁷.

Madam President,

In conclusion, the Holy See reiterates its sincere gratitude to the IAEA and affirms its unwavering support for the Agency's many contributions to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, as well as to the safe, secure, and peaceful development and operation of nuclear technologies.

Thank you.

⁶ Letter of Pope Francis to the Bishop of Hiroshima on the Occasion of the G7 Summit, 19 May 2023.

⁷ Pope Francis, Message to the High-Level Virtual Climate Ambition Summit, 12 December 2020.