



STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE 68th GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

DELIVERED BY

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Mr. President,

I have the great honour to convey to you, and to all the distinguished participants at this 68th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the best wishes and cordial greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis.

I would like to extend my congratulations to you and the members of the Board on your election. Allow me also to express the appreciation of the Holy See to Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi and to the Secretariat for their dedicated work for the benefit of all of the 178 Member States of the IAEA. In particular, I would like to commend the Director General for his tireless efforts to ensure the safety and security of nuclear facilities threatened by the war in Ukraine and to prevent what Pope Francis has described as a “nuclear disaster.”

The Holy See places considerable value on the work of this unique international organisation, particularly in relation to the implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, with a view to preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and facilitating the dissemination of the advantages of peaceful nuclear science and technology available to developing countries.

Mr. President,

Pope Francis insists that, “in order to make peace a reality, we must move away from the logic of the legitimacy of war: if this were valid in earlier times, when wars were more limited in scope, in our own day, with weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, the battlefield has become practically unlimited, and the effects potentially catastrophic. The time has come to say an emphatic ‘no’ to war, to state that wars cannot be justified, but only peace is just: a stable and lasting peace, built not on the precarious balance of deterrence, but on the fraternity that unites us.”¹ A fraternity that arises from the recognition of our common Father.²

The current armed conflicts in many regions of the world are a cause for grave concern. In lieu of promoting negotiations and dialogue to pave the way for a peace rooted in justice, good faith and respect for international law, an accelerated arms race, fuelled by escalating wars is taking precedence over disarmament efforts.

In light of these considerations, the Holy See calls for ethical reflection on the significant risks associated with the continued possession of nuclear weapons, the urgent need for renewed progress in disarmament, and the development of peace-building initiatives. As Pope Francis stated, “the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral”³. It is incumbent on all the international community to keep alive the vision that “a world free of nuclear arms is possible and necessary”⁴. It is

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the Security Council of the United Nations, 14 June 2023.

² Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 3 October 2020, 46 and 272.

³ Pope Francis, Address at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, 24 November 2019.

⁴ Pope Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 10 January 2022.

imperative that international organizations continue their work of raising awareness and promoting adequate regulatory measures.⁵ The Holy See reiterates its appeal for collective and joint commitment to the promotion of a culture of care, which gives primacy to human dignity and the common good. Pope Francis insists that “the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative.”⁶ In alignment with this perspective, the Holy See signed and ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, with the objective of transitioning beyond the paradigm of nuclear deterrence towards a world free of nuclear weapons.⁷

The Holy See acknowledges the pivotal role of the IAEA in the pursuit of a nuclear-weapon-free world, as well as its commendable contributions to the advancement of nuclear safety and security. In particular, the Holy See supports the IAEA’s efforts to ensure safety and security at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant. Reported military activities in the vicinity of Zaporizhzhya, and at the Kursk nuclear power plants, are deeply troubling. We commend Director General Grossi and his inspectors for their courage and professionalism in maintaining a continuous presence on the ground in Zaporizhzhya and providing impartial and objective reports on the situation. Furthermore, the Holy See urges the parties to the conflict to refrain from attacking these sites, the consequences of which could be devastating for all humanity.

Additionally, the Holy See welcomes the continued efforts of the Agency to engage with Iran on its nuclear programme. It is regrettable that the Islamic Republic of Iran stopped implementing its nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) several years ago. In his address to the Diplomatic Corps in January this year, Pope Francis expressed hope for the resumption of negotiations to reinstate the JCPOA “to ensure a safer future for all.”⁸

With regard to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Holy See appreciates the continued and patient efforts of the international community to revive negotiations on the nuclear programme of the DPRK, which, with its continued production of nuclear weapons and missile tests, poses a serious threat to the integrity of the non-proliferation regime. IAEA safeguards are therefore an essential contribution to promoting peace and security and helping to build a climate of confidence rather than mutual recrimination.

Mr. President,

Global security needs to be integral, capable of embracing issues including access to food and water, respect for the environment, health care, energy sources

⁵ Cf. Pope Francis, Message to mark the Conference on “*Pacem in Terris*” organized by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 12 September 2023.

⁶ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 3 October 2020, 262.

⁷ Cf. Statement of the Holy See to the 62nd General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, 17 September 2018.

⁸ Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 8 January 2024.

and the equitable distribution of the world's goods.⁹

The IAEA plays a unique role in nearly all of these areas, assisting developing countries in leveraging nuclear technology to enhance food production, generate more electricity, water resource management, environmental monitoring and pollution control, and pandemic preparedness. The Holy See welcomes recent initiatives such as *Atoms4Food*, aimed at strengthening food security; *Atoms4NetZero*, which helps countries in the transition to net zero; and *NUTEK Plastics*, which addresses the global challenge of plastic pollution. These initiatives exemplify the beneficial use of peaceful nuclear science and technology.

Furthermore, the IAEA's efforts to facilitate the provision of radiotherapy and nuclear medicine available to cancer patients in developing countries are becoming increasingly crucial in the context of the rising prevalence of this disease. The IAEA's *Rays of Hope* cancer initiative represents just one of the numerous avenues through which the Agency contributes to the good health and wellbeing of the global populations.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, the Holy See reaffirms its unwavering support for the IAEA's numerous contributions to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, as well as to the safe, secure, and peaceful use of nuclear technologies. It is essential that these technologies must always be approached from a perspective that serves the common good of humanity and the integral human development of each person.

Thank you.

⁹ Cf. Pope Francis, Letter to the Bishop of Hiroshima on the occasion of the G7 Summit, 19 May 2023.