

## Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons

### Faith Communities on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons

Date: Tuesday 9 December 2014

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We speak as individuals deeply engaged in religious life. We draw from the experiences of our respective faith communities, composed of women, men and children who seek to experience that which is true and sacred in the midst of daily living. We strive to express our faith through acts of caring, kindness and generosity. We discover the sacred in the face of a neighbor in need, experience truth in the bonds of trust that weave human communities together.

Nothing more decisively threatens this fabric of life than nuclear weapons, their proliferation and the grim possibility of their use. Whether such use is by design, miscalculation or nihilistic madness is irrelevant. The outcome will be the same.

Nuclear weapons are tools of terror designed to wreak death and destruction on whole populations, nations, the Earth itself. This was demonstrated beyond doubt in August 1945, when the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were subjected to atomic attack. Since then, the catastrophic impact of nuclear weapons tests on human health and the living environment has driven this fact home.

Nuclear weapons are utterly incompatible with the values upheld by our respective faith traditions—the right of people to live in security and dignity; the commands of conscience and justice; the duty to protect the vulnerable and to exercise the stewardship that will safeguard the planet for future generations. Nuclear weapons manifest a wanton disregard for all these values and commitments. There is no countervailing imperative—whether of national security, stability in international power

relations, or the difficulty of overcoming political inertia—that can justify their continued existence, much less their use.

Although the Cold War has ended, the mutual suspicion, mistrust and fear that undergirded the logic of nuclear deterrence still hold sway, exerting if anything a more powerful influence in international relations. Today we raise our voices in the name of sanity and the shared values of humanity. We reject the immorality of holding whole populations hostage, threatened with a cruel and miserable death. We urge political leaders to muster the courage needed to break the deepening spirals of mistrust that undermine the viability of human societies and threaten our shared future.

The elimination of nuclear weapons is not only a moral imperative; it is the ultimate measure of our worth as a species, as human beings. Acceptance of the continued existence of nuclear weapons stifles our capacity to think more broadly and more compassionately about who we are as human beings, and what our potential is.

Humanity must find alternative ways of dealing with conflict.

People of faith are practiced in grappling with questions of overwhelming import. Our faiths teach us not to flinch or retreat in the face of seemingly intractable realities. They kindle enduring hope and determination, propelling our efforts to eliminate needless suffering. They drive our work for a just world free from nuclear weapons, one where our talents and resources are dedicated to the cause of human happiness and security.

Therefore as people of faith, we pledge to:

1. Communicate within our respective faith communities the inhumane and immoral nature of nuclear weapons and the unacceptable risks posed by their continued existence, empowering people, especially our youth, with a clear understanding of nuclear realities, including the dangers of accidental nuclear detonation, nuclear proliferation and terrorism, thus building popular momentum and action for the complete prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons;

2. Engage in dialogue both within our respective faith traditions and with people of other faiths to raise awareness of the moral imperative to abolish nuclear weapons, making this a value that is taught, studied and lived through daily action;
3. Heed the voices of the world's *hibakusha* who have been urging complete abolition of nuclear weapons in order to prevent their suffering from being visited on any other individual, family or society, and we urge world leaders to do the same;
4. Work with the international community to fully utilize the emerging process including successive joint statements on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, to catalyze concrete action leading to the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons, which is consistent with existing obligations imposed on all states by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and affirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion;
5. Continue to express our strong support for international efforts to ban nuclear weapons on humanitarian grounds and call for the commencement of negotiations by states on a new legal instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons without further delay and in a forum open to all states and block-able by none.

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Titles and affiliations provided for identification purposes only; names appear in alphabetical order.