

April 23, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

Thank you for your many efforts to resolve difficult conflicts through diplomacy in our world where violence is too often the norm. We are writing to you today about another matter of urgency if world peace is ever to be realized: the elimination of nuclear weapons.

This letter requests that our government take specific steps in that regard during the Preparatory Committee of the Non-Proliferation Treaty meeting, 28 April – 9 May 2014, at the United Nations.

As the leadership of Catholic communities and organizations in the United States, we are sending this letter in collaboration with the World Council of Churches and its member churches. It is an inter-regional call for action by a variety of churches that are also contacting their governments.

We would like to begin by expressing our disappointment that the United States did not take part in the 2nd International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Nayarit, Mexico, in February. The meeting clarified critical nuclear challenges by bringing together a significant cross-section of the international community for an evidence-based accounting of what nuclear weapons do to people, societies and the environment.

It seems clear that similar evidence-based accountability is very much needed at the forthcoming NPT Preparatory Committee. As you are aware, the meeting is charged with assessing progress on the NPT Action Plan of 2010. While the plan strikes a much-needed balance between disarmament and non-proliferation, four years have passed with very little evidence of follow-through on disarmament. In particular, the key Disarmament Actions (Actions 1 - 10) remain almost completely unfulfilled.

Meanwhile, there has been vigorous action on one topic in the NPT Action Plan. A multilateral humanitarian initiative has emerged around the states parties' "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons" and "the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law."

It is on this point that we earnestly request our government to engage in constructive, collective actions at the Preparatory Committee. We ask that the government highlight, affirm or acknowledge in its statements:

New Momentum for a Ban - Affirm the new momentum toward a ban on nuclear weapons on humanitarian grounds. It has been generated since 2010. The evidence is found in the humanitarian initiative's high levels of participation, the shift in the terms of debate on nuclear weapons, and new awareness of economic, political and ethical costs of retaining nuclear weapons. We refer to milestones like the Open-Ended Working Group convened in Geneva in mid-2013 and the humanitarian impact conferences in Norway and Mexico. Such progress is drawing strength from among the majority of states without nuclear weapons and from civil society including churches. It is important to note that most public opinion surveys show strong opposition to nuclear weapons, a marked contrast to the long-standing deadlock in multilateral disarmament forums.

Ban Helps Fulfil NPT – Reference the ways in which a humanitarian ban on nuclear weapons would enhance states parties' capacity to achieve the NPT's goals. For example, banning nuclear weapons because of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences would build the norm against nuclear weapons precisely where the NPT falls short:

- (a) Setting a common standard for all states while ending the special status of a few states;
- (b) Placing nuclear weapons under the rule and obligation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law;
- (c) Recognizing the essential role of non-nuclear majority states in creating conditions for a nuclear-weapon-free world and achieving this global public good of the highest order.

Join Vienna Conference - Announce at the NPT Preparatory Committee that our government will participate in the 3rd International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, to be convened by Austria in late 2014. This will further strengthen the current, majority-led momentum.

Like the United Nations and the World Council of Churches, the Catholic Church has repeatedly condemned nuclear weapons. Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations said that the Holy See, "strongly advocates for transparent, verifiable, global and irreversible nuclear disarmament..." (July 2011) In recent weeks, Pope Francis reiterated the Church's call for nuclear disarmament: "I make my own the appeal of my predecessors for the non-proliferation of arms and for disarmament of all parties, beginning with nuclear and chemical weapons ..." (World Day of Peace 2014)

Thank you for your consideration. We will look forward to receiving your reply.

Sincerely,

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