

Leading Scientists and Catholic Leaders Call on President Biden to Work for a World Free of the Nuclear Threat

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We are scientists committed to protecting health and safety, and Catholic leaders committed to the common good of all people. We are united in calling on President Biden to reduce the nuclear threat as our nation works with others for a world without nuclear weapons.

Scientific research has provided ample evidence of the devastating humanitarian and ecological consequences of the production and use of nuclear weapons. Testing and production has killed or impaired the health of many thousands. One nuclear bomb dropped on a major city could kill millions; a nuclear war could bring on a nuclear winter and kill billions. Spending on nuclear weapons diverts scarce resources from programs that improve human health and security.

Catholic social thought, whose principles find resonances in other religious traditions, forbids the use of weapons of mass destruction that would cause indiscriminate harm to civilians and damage disproportionate to any legitimate objective. The Catholic tradition has condemned the nuclear arms race as a theft from the poor. The arms race robs humanity of the resources it needs to address basic human needs and aggravates the underlying causes of war.

The year following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Albert Einstein warned: “The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe.” During his 2019 visit to Nagasaki, Pope Francis declared, “...[A] world without nuclear weapons is possible and necessary.... We need to ponder the catastrophic impact of their deployment, especially from a humanitarian and environmental standpoint....”

Together we affirm President Biden’s extension of the New START Treaty with Russia as a solid first step. We pledge our support for additional steps to reform U.S. nuclear weapons policy, reduce nuclear dangers, and reaffirm a U.S. commitment to pursue a world free of the nuclear threat. We urge the Administration to:

- declare that the United States will never use nuclear weapons first;
- work with Russia and then with other nations to verifiably reduce nuclear arsenals;
- redirect spending from new nuclear weapons and modernization programs toward other pressing needs that build human security;
- affirm the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as complementary to existing agreements, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty;
- work for a successful conclusion at the Tenth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, with nuclear states honoring their disarmament obligations;
- aim to ratify and bring into force the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty;
- promote a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty to prohibit production of weapons-grade materials;
- strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency to monitor compliance with disarmament obligations; and
- extend the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, set to expire in 2022.

We will urge bipartisan support of an ambitious nuclear disarmament agenda. In his second inaugural address, President Reagan supported “the elimination one day of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth.” In his Prague speech, President Obama “state[ed] clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” We call on President Biden to reaffirm the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and to take concrete steps to realize it.

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