



Digest
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Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament

This Digest marks Pope Francis' call for the abolition of nuclear weapons and publicises his call to condemn even the possession of nuclear weapons. In his talk to participants at the Vatican meeting on *'Prospects of a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and Integral Disarmament'* on November 10th 2017, the Pope said that the very possession of nuclear weapons had to be firmly condemned. This marks a shift from the position of Pope John Paul II in 1982, who also condemned the use of nuclear weapons but allowed for the fact that small amounts of such weaponry might be regarded as a deterrent to greater conflict. Various role players in the campaign to ban all nuclear weapons have cited the Vatican, and Pope Francis in particular, as a key motivator in their work, and the role of the Vatican as being pivotal in the UN Treaty banning nuclear weapons.

At the Vatican meeting, experts discussed the implications of the recent UN Treaty and some of the possible steps to implement it, the long term vision for a nuclear free world, and alternative uses of financial expenditure on development issues. Pope Francis also cited the fact that the high costs of developing and maintaining such weapons significantly reduced budgets for fighting poverty and undertaking educational and ecological projects.

Several commentators have pointed to the policy shift in the Church's thinking. It has been described, theologically, as a move from a strictly conditional acceptance of nuclear deterrence towards an outright condemnation. The third last link below unpacks this. One commentator spoke of a shift from an 'interim ethic of deterrence to an interim ethic of disarmament' (see penultimate link). Bishop Tom Gumbleton, one of the original drafters of the 1983 USA Bishops Pastoral Letter, *'The Challenge of Peace'*, said that the Pope now expects Episcopal Conferences to follow up on this position with strategies to effect disarmament. The fourth last link is to a 2009 speech by Cardinal O'Brien that outlines the evolution of a theological position in this regard. A number of secular agencies have noted the Pope's position and have acknowledged its synergy with the UN's position.

Finally, on the way back from his visit to South-East Asia, Pope Francis explained his thinking regarding the position he has taken on nuclear weapons. This is the last link.

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