



Archdiocese of Santa Fe

Office of Communications/Social Media

4000 St. Joseph's Place NW | Albuquerque, NM 87120-1714

Leslie M. Radigan, Director

Voice: 505.831.8180

lradigan@archdiosf.org | archdiosf.org

STATEMENT

Most Reverend John C. Wester on the 60th Anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis: Eliminate the Nuclear Danger by Eliminating Nuclear Weapons

ALBUQUERQUE – Monday, October 17, 2022 – This is a reissued statement from Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe for the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis, originally released Friday, October 14, 2022.

We are now marking the anniversary of the beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis, regarded as the closest that humanity has ever come to global nuclear annihilation. But now, 60 years later, even President Biden is invoking that dreaded name of Armageddon to describe what could potentially occur in the crisis over Ukraine.

Robert McNamara, Defense Secretary under President Kennedy, said that we survived the Cuban Missile Crisis only by plain dumb luck. In my own childhood, I had to practice the futile exercise of “duck and cover” in school. It deeply pains me to think of young boys and girls growing up today with renewed nuclear threats that should have been decisively dealt with and resolved 60 years ago.

We still have not learned the essential lesson of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which is that the only way to eliminate the nuclear danger is through careful, universal, verifiable steps to eliminate nuclear weapons. It is the very nature of these weapons that the possession of any nuclear weapons is an existential danger to all. And Pope Francis has been explicitly clear that “the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral.”

That the nuclear weapons states have no intention to honor their pledge to eliminate nuclear weapons is made abundantly clear yet again by the failure of the recent Review Conference of the NonProliferation Treaty to make any progress whatsoever toward global nuclear disarmament. Yet the U.S. and other nuclear weapons powers sternly denounce the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which the Vatican was the first nation-state to sign.

But what do the nuclear weapons powers have to offer as an alternative when they so intentionally ignore the NonProliferation Treaty’s 50-year-old obligation to enter into serious negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament? Their answer is instead trillions of dollars invested into so-called “modernization” programs that will keep nuclear weapons forever. This does more than just help fuel a new nuclear arms race. It also robs society of resources that could help humanity achieve its full potential through better educational and health systems, wildfire protection, repair of critical infrastructure, and addressing new climate change threats.

Many will no doubt say that it's naïve to believe that nuclear weapons can be abolished. Yes, it will be extremely hard work, which must be concretely verified. But isn't it the height of naiveté to believe that humanity can continue to survive with nuclear weapons? Counting on luck is not a sustainable strategy given the history of accidents, near misses and nuclear saber rattling by volatile and threatening world leaders.

No dictator lasts forever, and some day Putin will be gone. But do we have to live with the threat of nuclear weapons forever? We need to pray for peace in Ukraine and to begin working in a determined, deliberate manner towards a future world free of nuclear weapons. More money is spent on nuclear weapons research and production in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe than any other diocese in the country because of the Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories. Therefore, this archdiocese has a special responsibility to help lead humanity toward nuclear weapons abolition. And our labs could help us toward that end by providing new verification technologies that could help underpin a future world free of nuclear weapons.

The New Mexican congressional delegation frequently touts expanding nuclear weapons production programs as jobs programs. Yet, New Mexico remains mired at the bottom of numerous socioeconomic indicators, such as the most children living in poverty and declining per capita income relative to the other 49 states. The Department of Energy plans to spend \$9.4 billion in the Land of Enchantment this fiscal year, more than the entire state's operating budget of \$8.5 billion. Yet the economic benefits appear to stay in privileged enclaves such as Los Alamos County (which is the fourth richest county in the USA), while some of the poorest communities in the nation are contiguous to the lab.

Because of this and more, I call upon the New Mexico congressional delegation to reverse course. Congress should have the courage to begin to help lead us toward a future world free of nuclear weapons. In particular, I call upon the New Mexican congressional delegation to end their support for unneeded, exorbitantly expensive plutonium pit production for nuclear weapons. This future pit production is not to maintain the safety and reliability of the existing nuclear weapons stockpiles but is instead for speculative new-design nuclear weapons that could push the U.S. back into testing. All this can help fuel the new nuclear arms race, which is tragic folly 60 years after the Cuban Missile Crisis.

I again renew my call for dialogue on the existential issue of eliminating nuclear weapons, in which the New Mexico congressional delegation should help lead.

For further reading and suggested actions, please see my pastoral letter [*Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament*](#), or read the [summary](#).

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