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STATEMENT

**Archbishop John C. Wester's Statement in Support of the
First Meeting of State Parties to the Treaty on the
Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**

ALBUQUERQUE – Monday, June 20, 2022—IMMEDIATE RELEASE—Most Reverend John C. Wester has issued a statement in support of the First Meeting of State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons:

The United States and the eight other nuclear-armed states are boycotting the historic First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons taking place in Vienna this June 21-23. The Treaty, banning nuclear weapons just like previous weapons of mass destruction treaties banning chemical and biological weapons, has been signed by 122 countries and ratified by 62.

Non-party states, like the U.S., have been invited to attend as observers. Historically, major allies such as Norway, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium are attending (the last three countries host U.S. nuclear bombs on their soil). Many organizations and several members of Congress have written to President Biden, urging him to send a representative. The U.S. government refuses to go despite the declared official policy of supporting a future world free of nuclear weapons. What is it afraid of?

In July 2017, the Vatican was the first nation-state to sign the nuclear weapons ban treaty. The nuclear weapons powers have failed to honor their obligation in the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty to enter into serious negotiations leading to global nuclear disarmament. Therefore, the ban treaty represents the only available path out from under what President Kennedy described as the “nuclear sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident or miscalculation or by madness.” The entry into force of the ban treaty in January 2021 was a great step toward the light; it brought hope to those who seek a world free from the threat of nuclear annihilation.

The international legal force of the Treaty is limited to those states that have formally joined the Treaty. But the moral power of this Treaty does not recognize boundaries between nations nor lines on a map—the moral power of this Treaty is global and universal.

The nuclear-armed states have a moral obligation to hear the voices of the rest of the world and to listen to those held hostage to the threat of existential annihilation at the whim of any one of nine men in the world. Russia's nuclear saber-rattling over Ukraine has made this very clear.

The voices of those nation-states who have joined the Treaty and those who have been impacted by the use and testing of nuclear weapons will be raised in Vienna on June 21-23. This First Meeting of States Parties represents another historic step on the journey toward hope, toward the light, toward a world free of nuclear weapons. I say this even as we celebrate the new holiday of

Juneteenth, commemorating the abolition of slavery. The abolition of slavery was said to be impossible. So it will be with nuclear weapons.

From the heart of the U.S.' nuclear weapons research and production complex here in New Mexico, I call upon the United States and other nuclear-armed states to attend the First Meeting and future meetings as observers, to bear witness to the need for nuclear disarmament and take this first small step toward signing, ratifying, and implementing the Treaty.

This is the only path toward the preservation of God's creation and the deliverance of all God's children from the threat of nuclear weapons. As Pope Francis declared, "We must never grow weary of working to support the principal international legal instruments of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons." It is the duty of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, the birthplace of nuclear weapons, to support that Treaty while working toward universal, verifiable nuclear disarmament.

I lend my voice in strong support of the first meeting of State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Most Reverend John C. Wester
Archbishop of Santa Fe