

Disarmament Week: October 24-31

“The teaching of the Catholic Church in this area has been clear and consistent. It has deplored the arms race . . .” --Pope John Paul II

The annual observance of Disarmament Week, October 24th-31st, which begins on the anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, was called for in the Final Document of the UN General Assembly 1978 special session on disarmament (resolution S-10/2). States, nongovernmental organizations and citizens are invited to participate in this week by focusing on the danger of the arms race, propagating the need for its cessation and increasing public understanding of the urgent tasks of disarmament.

The tools of war and their continued existence remain a major threat to peace and a challenge to the international community. Read the reflections below and then complete the discussion questions with your group.

REFLECTIONS

The LORD will settle international disputes. All the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. All wars will stop, and military training will come to an end.

Micah 4:3

And even as he said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a mob that was armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent out by the leading priests and other leaders of the people. Judas had given them a prearranged signal: “You will know which one to arrest when I go over and give him the kiss of greeting.” So Judas came straight to Jesus. “Greetings, Teacher!” he exclaimed and gave him the kiss. Jesus said, “My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for.” Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. One of the men with Jesus pulled out a sword and slashed off an ear of the high priest’s servant. “Put away your sword,” Jesus told him. “Those who use the sword will be killed by the sword. Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly?”

Matthew 26: 47-53

“All States have responsibility for world peace and this peace cannot be ensured until a security based on arms is gradually replaced with a *security based on the solidarity of the human family.*”

Pope John Paul II, 1987 World Day of Peace Message

“Innocent people throughout the world are still threatened by weapons of mass destruction. They face additional threats from major conventional weapons, as well as from the destabilizing accumulation and illicit sale of small arms and light weapons, and the continued production and use of landmines.”
Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2002 UN Disarmament Yearbook.

“The teaching of the Catholic Church in this area has been clear and consistent. It has deplored the arms race, called nonetheless for mutual progressive and verifiable reduction of armaments as well as greater safeguards against possible misuse of these weapons. It has done so while urging that the independence, freedom and legitimate security of each and every nation be respected.”

A Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the General Assembly of the United Nations, 1982

“The old policies of nuclear deterrence, which prevailed during the time of the Cold War, must lead now to concrete disarmament measures, based on dialogue and multilateral negotiation, which are essential values in the disarmament process. Through the instruments of international law, they facilitate the peaceful resolution of controversies, help better mutual understanding and foster a climate of trust, cooperation and respect between all



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REFLECTIONS (continued)

States. In this way they promote the effective affirmation of the culture of life and peace, which is based upon the values of responsibility, solidarity and dialogue.”

Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Renato R. Martino at the First Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations on General and Complete Disarmament, October 1, 2002

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in a final sense of theft from those who hunger and are not fed—those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone—it is spending the wheat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

On the other hand, we are deeply distressed to see the enormous stocks of armaments that have been, and continue to be, manufactured in the economically more developed countries. This policy is involving a vast outlay of intellectual and material resources, with the result that the people of these countries are saddled with a great burden, while other countries lack the help they need for their economic and social development .

Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, #109

“We are confronted by two opposing perspectives: the first is based on the conviction that conflicts can be resolved through a determined and broad-based willingness to negotiate effectively in light of the ways and wisdom of the law; the second perspective maintains that, in the face of elusive and re-emergent threats, force is more efficacious and direct. However, the latter appears to only reduce international cooperation in disarmament rather than enhance it, inducing negative repercussions on multilateralism. A clear message in favor of the force of law and not the law of force should emerge from this substantive session.”

Statement of H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Permanent Observer of the Holy See Before the First Committee of the 57th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Disarmament, April 1, 2003

“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

Discussion Questions

The administration of President George W. Bush is requesting \$399.1 billion for the military in fiscal year 2004 (\$379.9 billion for the Defense Department and \$19.3 billion for the nuclear weapons functions of the Department of Energy). In all, the administration plans to spend \$2.7 TRILLION on the military over the next six years. (Source: Center for Defense Information)

Based on these facts, how does the Catholic Church’s stance on the arms race differ from that of the U.S. government?

How does the arms race prevent the economic and social development of individuals, peoples and regions both in our country and throughout the world?

Archbishop Celestino Migliore states that “a clear message in favor of the force of law and not the law of force should emerge” Based on recent U.S. foreign policy, what message does the U.S. send out to the world?

How do fear and mistrust between individuals, peoples and countries thwart efforts for disarmament? What are some possible steps to moving beyond this fear and mistrust towards the solidarity that Pope John Paul II speaks of? What role does dialogue play in this movement?

The United Nations provides one fora in which multilateral negotiations (negotiations between more than two countries) can take place to discuss disarmament measures. Why does the Vatican emphasize the need for multilateral negotiations, as opposed to bilateral negotiations (between only two countries) or unilateral decisions? Can one or two countries create peace? Why does the work for peace require the participation of the entire international community?

