

Archbishop calls for political will to end 'scourge' of nuclear weapons

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Nuclear weapons have “threatened humanity” for far too long and the world’s leaders lack the political will to remove “this scourge,” said the Vatican’s ambassador to the United Nations.

“Now is the time for a profound rethinking and change in our perception of nuclear weapons. Nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation are essential from a humanitarian point of view,” Archbishop Francis Chullikatt told an audience in Kansas City.

He stressed the urgency of a “world without nuclear weapons.”

His address, delivered at the Catholic Center of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, was sponsored by the diocesan Human Rights Office. He was invited by Bishop Robert W. Finn to speak July 1 about the Catholic Church’s teaching on nuclear deterrence, the use of nuclear weapons and the goal of a nuclear weapon free world.

According to The Catholic Key, the diocesan newspaper, Jude Huntz, director of the Human Rights Office, proposed a conference on the nuclear question to explain church teaching on nuclear weapons in light of growing concerns over local construction of a \$1 billion plant for the manufacture and assembly of non-nuclear parts for nuclear weapons.

“Since the groundbreaking last September, they’ve been building a nuclear weapons plant here in our city. We thought this would be a good teaching moment,” Huntz said.

In his address, Archbishop Chullikatt outlined the church’s “growing abhorrence” of nuclear weapons and stressed that its condemnation of them has always been grounded in respect for life and the dignity of the human person.

He said Catholic teaching has always emphasized the need to make the world safe

from nuclear weapons, “not to make the world safer through the threat of nuclear weapons.” He also pointed out that the church’s moral acceptance of nuclear deterrence was always conditioned on progress toward elimination of nuclear weapons.

He said that as development needs across the globe are outpacing the resources being devoted to them, the expense of building nuclear arsenals is also “nothing short of sinful” and the “grossest misplacement of priorities.”

Archbishop Chullikatt said there are currently 20,000 nuclear weapons in 111 sites in 14 countries. More than half the population of the world lives in a nuclear-armed country and each year, countries spend \$100 billion on maintaining and modernizing their nuclear arsenals.

He said the time is right to “begin addressing in a systematic way the legal, political and technical requisites for a nuclear weapons-free world.” To accomplish this, he said, preparatory work should begin as soon as possible on a framework agreement leading to the phased elimination of nuclear weapons.

“Every nuclear weapons system and every nuclear weapons policy should be judged by the ultimate goal of protecting human life and dignity and the related goal of ridding the world of these weapons in mutually verifiable ways,” he added.

The archbishop acknowledged that some steps toward disarmament have been made, but he said these efforts were not enough, pointing out that there is still a “profusion of nuclear weapons.”

He also noted that serious concerns about the safety of nuclear power plants, the effect of radiation leaks on workers and communities, and debate over safe removal of nuclear waste were brought again to the fore by the March earthquake in Japan that crippled a nuclear power plant.

With regard to eliminating nuclear weapons, he said a critical first step would be an immediate ban on the testing of new weapons. To achieve that, he said all countries should ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

He also stressed that not enough is being done to eliminate nuclear weapons,

pointing out that the START treaty between the United States and Russia “only makes small reductions and leaves intact a vast nuclear arsenal on both sides, with many nuclear weapons held on constant alert status.”

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty was signed last December in Prague by U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. It calls for both countries to reduce their strategic arsenals – weapons deployed on long-range missiles, bombers and submarines – to 1,550 each. Under the previous START pact, which expired in December 2009, both countries reduced their strategic arsenals to 2,200 weapons each.

Archbishop Chullikatt said nuclear weapons have been “aptly described as the ‘ultimate evil’” and are still possessed by the most powerful countries that “refuse to let them go.”

“If biological weapons, chemical weapons, and now landmines can be done away with, so too can nuclear weapons,” he stressed, adding that no weapon threatens modern peace more than nuclear weapons.

In a nuclear war, he added, “there would be no victors, only victims.”