

Holy See urges establishment of 'nuclear-free zone' in Middle East

VATICAN CITY – A Vatican official called for the establishment of a “nuclear-free zone” in the Middle East and urged all countries to work toward total the elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the Vatican’s foreign affairs minister, released a statement Sept. 24 outlining the Vatican stance on nuclear disarmament. The U.N. Security Council held a summit the same day to discuss nuclear disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation.

“Nuclear-weapons-free zones are the best example of trust, confidence and affirmation that peace and security are possible without nuclear weapons,” said Archbishop Mamberti. He strongly encouraged all countries with nuclear capabilities to adopt all the protocols of nuclear-free treaties and to “establish such a zone in the Middle East.”

Under the treaties, nations agree to ban the development and use of nuclear weapons in a set location. The United States has not signed such a treaty. It has, however, signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which aims at limiting the spread of nuclear weapons.

The Security Council summit adopted a resolution to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, calling for tighter controls on nuclear materials and encouraging the enforcement of international treaties dealing with nuclear nonproliferation.

Archbishop Mamberti said that responding to the modern world’s need for safety and security “demands courageous leadership in reducing nuclear arsenals to zero.”

He said the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is of “highest importance,” adding that the universal banning of explosions of nuclear components in the testing phase “would inhibit the development of nuclear weapons, contributing to nuclear disarmament.”

Praising the summit initiative, the archbishop urged the Security Council to take further steps to “become a valid advocate in the cause of reaching a world free from nuclear weapons.”

He also urged nations around the world to follow the example of the Security Council by adopting clear and firm decisions aimed at a “progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament.”

In the past, he said, the United Nations’ approach to nuclear weapons has been case-specific, focusing on certain countries’ nuclear programs and on threats by independent groups, but has not made progress “in formulating plans for the establishment of a system of regulation of armaments” worldwide.

The summit was held in conjunction with the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and preceded the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, which aims to promote universal adherence to the treaty.