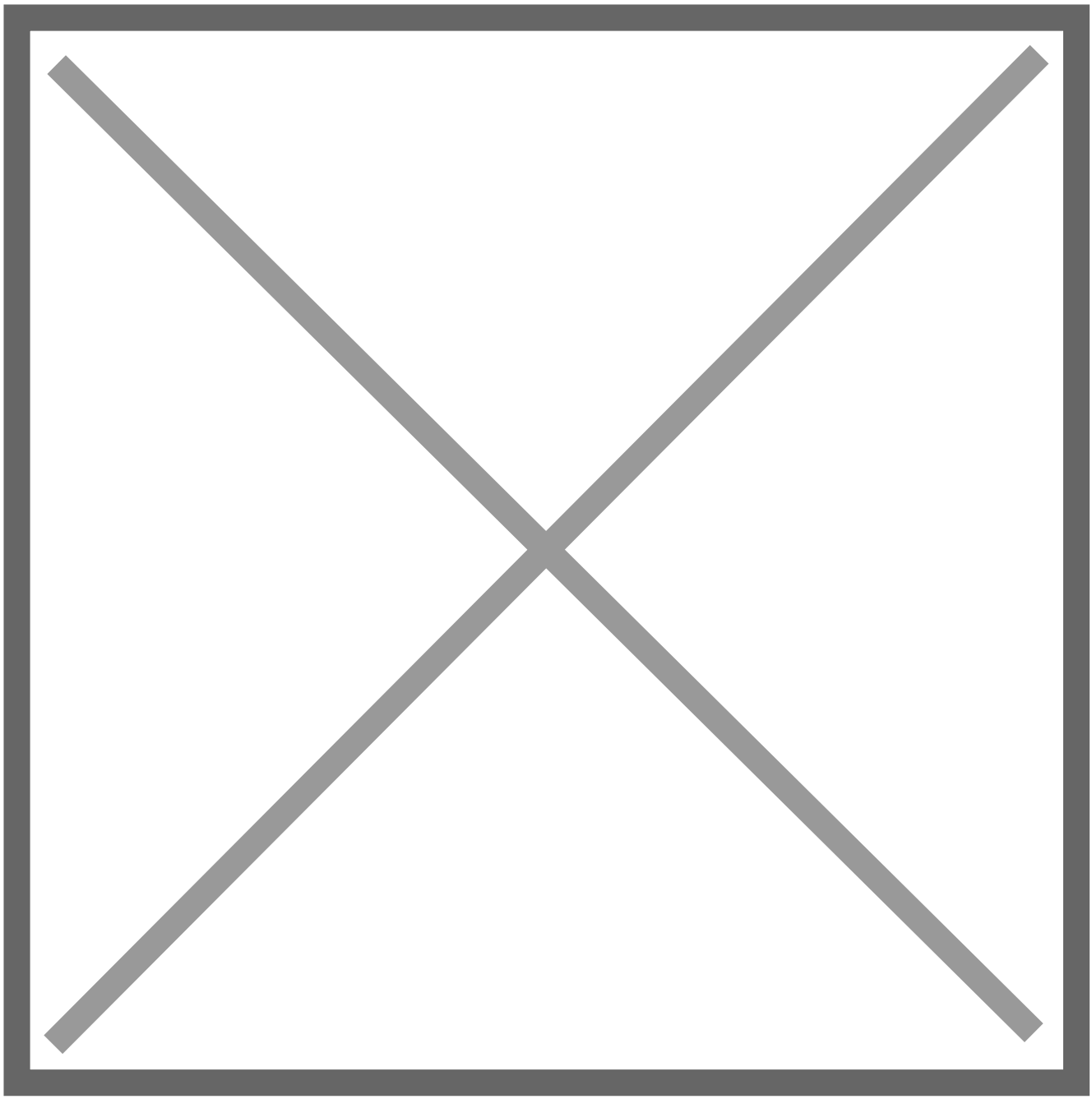


A girl in Barcelona, Spain, paints a peace mural May 9, 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials have threatened to use nuclear weapons in Russia's war against Ukraine. (CNS photo/Nacho Doce, Reuters)



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Nuclear-weapon-free zones model a way forward toward a world free of nuclear weapons, said Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations.

The international community "has rightly acknowledged the importance of such zones" and to date 116 U.N. member states are "party to the various nuclear-weapon-free-zone treaties in existence," he said Aug. 9.

He made the comments in a statement to a session of a U.N. review conference of countries who have signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

"The exceptional growth of nuclear-weapon-free zones calls into question the false notion that nuclear weapons enhance national prestige, while providing an effective deterrent," he said.

Caccia said the Vatican called on the international community "to consider further geographic areas suitable for the establishment of additional zones based on arrangements freely arrived at among the states of the region."

The U.N. should reconsider proposed zones in the Korean Peninsula, the Arctic and among European countries that do not have nuclear weapons, he added.

The archbishop quoted St. John XXII, who observed shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 that "everyone must sincerely cooperate in the effort to banish fear and the anxious expectation of war from men's minds."

"To do this, he stressed the need to replace the 'fundamental principles upon which peace is based' with 'the realization that true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust,'" Caccia said. "In no area is such trust more vital than in the pursuit of nonproliferation and disarmament."

"In this regard," the archbishop continued, "the Holy See commends the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which for 65 years has applied safeguards that not only build mutual trust, but also warn the international community when a state party's intentions diverge from obligations under Articles II and III" of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Under Article II, non-nuclear-weapon states that are party to the treaty undertake not to "manufacture or otherwise acquire" nuclear weapons or "seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture" of nuclear weapons.

Article III requires each of these non-nuclear-weapon states to conclude a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency "to prohibit the diversion of nuclear materials from peaceful to nonpeaceful uses."

Caccia said he and his U.N. delegation were concerned that "Iran and the P5+1 have yet to agree on returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which demonstrated the value of transparency and verification in lowering a climate of fear, mistrust and hostility."

"The Holy See sincerely hopes that the resumed dialogue in Vienna in a revival of the agreement that is 'lasting and efficacious,'" the archbishop said about recent talks.

"P5+1" refers to the U.N. Security Council's five permanent members -- China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States -- and Germany.

"Future nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties, as well as ongoing diplomacy related to current nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties, ought to specify that the provisions of these treaties equally apply during peace and war time," he added.

Caccia said his delegation hoped that during the U.N.'s treaty review conference, nations "would agree on measures to further enhance nuclear safeguards and nuclear-weapon-free zones with a view to achieving 'true and lasting peace among nations.'"

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