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Salesian Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Dev

Salesian Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, speaks during a conference on St. John XXIII's encyclical "Pacem in Terris" ("Peace on Earth") at Rome's Pontifical Lateran University May 11, 2023 (CNS photo/Justin McLellan)



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Multilateral institutions that have been stripped of power need a "profound reform" to guarantee peace and security between nations, Pope Francis wrote.

"It is not enough that they call for peace if they are not given the autonomous capacity to promote and realize concrete actions, since they risk not being at the service of the common good but partisan tools," he said.

In a message May 11 to participants in an academic conference on St. John XXIII's 1963 encyclical calling for a ban on nuclear weapons, *Pacem in Terris*, or "Peace on Earth," Pope Francis wrote that war has never contributed to resolving conflicts, but only created "victims, destruction, loss of humanity, intolerance" and undermined faith in the future.

"Peace, on the other hand," he said, "remains in the soul and the aspirations of the entire human family."

Even 60 years after the publication of *Pacem in Terris*, the pope said, "humanity does not seem to value how much peace is needed."

"One look at our daily reality shows us how much the self-centeredness of a few and their ever-narrowing interests lead some to think that they can find in weapons the solution to so many problems and emerging needs, and to the conflicts that emerge in the realities of nations," he said.

The pope lamented the growing practice of stockpiling weapons, which he said has again become a serious factor in international relations and one that "generates fear and terror and risks crushing security."

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Opening the conference at Rome's Pontifical Lateran University, Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, the papal vicar for Rome, said St. John XXIII's encyclical calls Christians to find the peace that God makes present within each person and the whole of creation.

"'Pacem in Terris' tells us that only by developing an attitude in which one's rights and duties come together, in which we recognize the needs of the other and institutions gain a sense of how to serve their own communities, only then will we have created the necessary conditions for peace," he said.

Salesian Sr. Alessandra Smerilli, secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development which promoted the conference, explained that Francis' social magisterium follows in the spirit of *Pacem in Terris*, which frames the church's social teaching in terms of human dignity rather than strictly clarifying Catholic doctrine.

"The most striking thing about how Pope Francis reads *Pacem in Terris* is what he understands to be the function of the church's social doctrine," she said.

"*Pacem in Terris* did not intend to affirm that it is the church's role to give concrete recommendations on subjects that, due to their complexity, should be left to open discussion," said Smerilli, citing a 2013 speech made by Francis to mark the encyclical's 50th anniversary.

"On political, economic, social issues, it's not dogma that will offer practical solutions, but rather dialogue, listening, patience, respect for the other, sincerity and a willingness to consider one's own opinion," she quoted.

The pope ended his message expressing his hope that young people attending the conference would build a "culture of encounter," which he said is the base upon which peace can be built.