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A black and white photo of the ruins of buildings. Some are in rubble and some are still stand

The city of Nagasaki, Japan, showed scant signs of recovery four years after an atomic bomb was detonated over the city Aug. 9, 1945. Ahead of 72nd anniversary of atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the chair of U.S. bishops' international policy committee calls both for remembrance of the bombings and for nuclear arms control. (OSV News photo/Milwaukee Journal Sentinel files, USA TODAY NETWORK via Reuters)



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The chairman of the U.S. bishops' international policy committee called on Catholics and all people of goodwill to pray that the leaders of the United States and other nations around the globe "who govern the control" of nuclear weapons "will earnestly seek to make critically needed progress on arms control."

"It has been said before, and it bears repeating, that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought," said Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace.

"Knowing the horrors that can be unleashed in a nuclear war, beseeching Our Lady of Fatima, may these leaders discover new pathways to peace heretofore unseen," the bishop said in a statement issued Aug. 1, days before the 78th anniversary of the U.S. detonating two atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki Aug. 6 and 9, 1945, respectively.

Malloy noted that in July 1945, as a key part of the Manhattan Project, the first nuclear weapon was detonated in the desert in New Mexico.

In the years since, "sadly, the development of nuclear weapons and threat of nuclear war has continued while arms control architecture is dissolving," he said.

"The Cold War ended over 30 years ago, yet for those who remember, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 brought us to the brink of nuclear annihilation," Malloy continued. "And only a precious few today remember those fateful events that brought an end to World War II in the Pacific. With the wars and threat of wars today, the menace of over 10,000 nuclear weapons in our world must not recede further from the public consciousness of today's generation."

He noted that "the scourge of the Russia-Ukraine war continues unabated and has included threats of using nuclear weapons."

Malloy outlined other threats to the world, including state and non-state actors "capitalizing on rapidly developing cyber technologies that are bringing forth weapons systems of increasing sophistication and lethality."

New START -- which is the last remaining major nuclear arms control treaty between the U.S. and Russia and establishes a limit on deployed strategic warheads -- "continues to unravel," he said.

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In his annual state of the nation address Feb. 21 of this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced Russia is suspending participation in the New START nuclear weapons treaty. The treaty, which took effect in 2011, is set to expire in February 2026.

Russia’s Foreign Ministry said in a Feb. 21 statement that “to maintain the necessary level of predictability and stability in the nuclear missile area, Russia will take a responsible approach and will continue to strictly comply with the quantitative restrictions stipulated” in the treaty regarding “strategic offensive arms” for the life of the treaty.

The statement blamed the U.S. for Russia's decision, saying, "Its overt course of malicious escalation of the conflict in and around Ukraine" has created "a fundamentally different security environment for us." Since Russia launched an all-out invasion of Ukraine Feb. 24, 2022, the U.S. has responded by directing more than $75 billion in military, financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

The U.S. Department of State said in a June 1 statement that "the Russian Federation's 'purported suspension' of the New START Treaty is legally invalid. As a result, Russia remains bound by its New START Treaty obligations, and is violating the treaty by failing to fulfill many of those obligations."

Malloy said "the billions of dollars" spent by countries on the development of weapons systems "are precious resources thereby unavailable for other critical needs of human and economic development."

"We must remain vigilant never to lose sight of the extraordinary dangers these weapons pose to humanity," he said. "In our efforts to support arms control, we must always be attentive to the differences between just and unjust considerations of statecraft."

Malloy quoted from a letter Pope Francis sent May 19 to Bishop Alexis-Mitsuru Shirahama of Hiroshima, where the 49th G7 summit took place May 19-21. The Group of Seven (G7) is an intergovernmental political forum consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

"Recalling his 2019 visit to Japan, Pope Francis reiterated that 'the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is, today more than ever, a crime not only against the dignity of human beings, but against any possible future of our common home,'" Malloy said.