News



Cardinal Silvano Maria Tomasi speaks at the Nobel Laureate Assembly for the Prevention of Nuclear War July 16, 2025, which was held at the University of Chicago July 14-16. (OSV News/courtesy of Jean Lachat)

Gina Christian

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Chicago — July 23, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Religious communities can "contribute to the global architecture of disarmament and restraint" in several "specific ways" that foster dialogue, prevention and accountability, said Cardinal Silvano Maria Tomasi, a longtime Vatican diplomat and disarmament advocate.

The cardinal shared his thoughts as part of the Nobel Laureate Assembly for the Prevention of Nuclear War, held at the University of Chicago July 14-16.

The three-day gathering saw some 20 Nobel laureates and 60 nuclear experts convene to discuss policy recommendations for mitigating the threat of nuclear war.

The event included the release of a declaration of "pragmatic actions" for steps toward long-term disarmament, including a global recommitment to end explosive nuclear testing. The declaration also called upon Russia, the U.S. and China to reduce their existing armaments and halt further expansion of their stockpiles.

Introducing Tomasi and the other speakers at the assembly's July 16 public announcement of recommendations were astrophysicist Brian Schmidt of the Australian National University, co-winner of the 2011 Nobel Prize in Physics, and fellow assembly organizer Daniel Holz, professor of physics, astronomy and astrophysics at the University of Chicago and chair of the science and security board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

The bulletin sets the Doomsday Clock, created in 1947 to warn the world how close humanity was to self-destruction through various technologies, is currently at 89 seconds to midnight.

Masako Wado, assistant secretary general of Nihon Hidankyo, the Japanese nuclear attack survivor group that received the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize, delivered a video message at the July 16 public event, warning, "The risk of using nuclear weapons

has never been higher than it is now."

She added that "nuclear deterrence, which intimidates other countries by possessing nuclear weapons, cannot save humanity."

The final day of the assembly marked the 80th anniversary of the Trinity Test, which took place in 1945 at the Alamogordo Bombing Range — specifically, in a section historically known as the Jornada del Muerto, or "Journey of Death" — approximately 210 miles south of Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Keynote speaker Robert Floyd, executive secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization, focused on "Remembering the Trinity Test on the 80th Anniversary."

The Trinity Test, the first of its kind, detonated a plutonium implosion device named "Gadget," with shockwaves from the blast generating pressure at the bomb's center that was 500,000 times greater than the earth's surface air pressure. Days after the test, the U.S. dropped two nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing a combined total of at least 210,000.

Advertisement

Physicist Robert Oppenheimer — director of Los Alamos National Laboratory, one of three sites associated with the project — named the test after John Donne's poems "Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness" and "Holy Sonnet XIV," the latter of which opens with the line, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God."

The test led to radiation contamination of soil, livestock and water, as well as an array of cancers and health issues, among area residents, who became known as "Downwinders."

Hours before the assembly's July 16 event, Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, led that state's Catholic bishops and other faith leaders and laypeople in a prayer for peace and nuclear disarmament, held at the Trinity site in the Jornada del Muerto desert. Later that same day, the archbishop presided at a Mass in Tularosa, New Mexico, followed by a candlelight vigil for victims of the Trinity Test.

Tomasi — whose remarks at the July 16 Chicago assembly were prefaced by a moment of silence, led by Schmidt, for the victims of nuclear testing and attacks — said that the "religious aspect" of nuclear risk "may offer some ideas of the complexity of the problems and the difficulty in communicating to everybody the disastrous consequences that the eventual use of even one atomic bomb can create."

In particular, he offered three concrete examples of how religious communities could assist in nuclear deterrence.

"Interfaith verification" programs would "establish a coalition of religious organizations trained to serve as civil society witnesses within arms control verification regimes," he said.

"While not inspectors in the technical sense, these religious witnesses would accompany U.N. teams, offering moral oversight, promoting transparency and increasing public trust in the disarmament process, especially in difficult regions where states distrust each other but still respect faith leaders in some way," said Tomasi.

Secondly, "faith-based early warning dialogue platforms" would "create regional interreligious confidence building mechanisms where faith leaders regularly meet with policymakers, scientists, and civil society actors to identify early signs of arms racing, destabilizing doctrines or doctrinal shifts that can cause negative repercussions," he said.

A "global interfaith council," comprised of "representatives from major world religions, ethicists, scientists and disarmament experts," could "assess and publish annual reports on the ethical implications of emerging technologies in relation to nuclear stability," Tomasi said.

He urged those present to not only mark the Trinity Test anniversary as a "solemn remembrance," but to regard the occasion as "an act of renewal."

"The Trinity explosion taught us what we are capable of destroying. The task before us now is to rediscover what we are capable of preserving and building," said Tomasi. "May this gathering be a milestone not in the remembrance of destruction, but in the awakening of conscience and commitment for peace and for solidarity with the entire human family."