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Pope Leo XIV talks to pilgrims and visitors during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI A

Pope Leo XIV talks to pilgrims and visitors during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Jan. 28, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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The expiration of the last remaining nuclear treaty between the United States and Russia risks unleashing "a new arms race that would further threaten peace among nations," Pope Leo XIV warned in a forceful appeal at the close of his general audience Feb. 4.

The New START treaty capped the number of deployed nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles in U.S. and Russian arsenals. With its expiration set for Feb. 5, no binding limits will remain on the nuclear stockpiles of the two Cold War rivals.

"I urgently call for this instrument not to be abandoned without seeking to ensure its concrete and effective follow-up," Leo said, calling the 2010 treaty "a significant

step in containing the proliferation of nuclear arms."

The pope encouraged nations to work toward nuclear disarmament and to build "mutual trust" among one another.

"It is more urgent than ever to substitute the logic of fear and distrust with a shared ethos capable of guiding choices towards the common good and to make peace a treasure to be cherished by all," Leo said.

The pope had previously written that "nuclear arms offend our shared humanity and also betray the dignity of creation" in an August message to Bishop Alexis Mitsuru Shirahama of Hiroshima, Japan.

Pope Francis strengthened the church's position against nuclear arms during his pontificate, calling the possession of nuclear arms for deterrence, and not only their use, "immoral."

Leo also called for prayers for the people of Ukraine "who are being severely tested by the consequences of the bombings which have resumed, also striking energy infrastructure."

Russia continued drone and missile strikes on Ukrainian energy systems Feb. 2-3 despite indications that such attacks would be temporarily halted. The strikes have left many to brace the country's coldest winter in over a decade.

Trilateral peace talks involving Ukraine, Russia and the United States resumed in Abu Dhabi Feb. 4.

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