

Prelate calls for a nuclear-weapons-free world

Joshua J. McElwee | Jul. 10, 2011



Archbishop Francis Chullikatt (NCR photo/Joshua J. McElwee)

KANSAS CITY, MO. -- The Vatican's representative to the United Nations has called for the phasing out of all nuclear weapons from the world "as soon as possible."

"Viewed from a legal, political, security and most of all moral perspective, there is no justification today for the continued maintenance of nuclear weapons," said Archbishop Francis Chullikatt.

"This is the moment to begin addressing in a systematic way the legal, political and technical requisites for a nuclear-weapons-free world," he said.

Chullikatt delivered a July 1 talk on "The Nuclear Question: The Church's Teachings and the Current State of Affairs" at the invitation of the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocese's human rights office.

He said that the Holy See calls "for more stringent attention to the urgency of implementing a well-founded comprehensive approach to eliminating nuclear weapons."

For the past several years local Catholic peace activists have been mounting a campaign to oppose a nuclear weapons facility now under construction in Kansas City. The \$673 million plant, the first new nuclear weapons plant in 33 years, will produce nonnuclear parts for nuclear weapons. The city government has subsidized the facility's construction with \$815 million in municipal bonds.

The activists have filed lawsuits and have held weekly protests at the facility's construction site. They recently gathered enough signatures to place an initiative on a local fall ballot, which, they say, if passed, would compel the operator of the facility to cease nuclear work in favor of green energy production.

While Chullikatt prefaced his talk by saying he wouldn't speak about specific components of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, he told those gathered they could "easily draw their own conclusions" from his speech, which cited heavily from statements by bishops, popes and church documents.

Quoting from Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 World Peace Day address, Chullikat exhorted that "the truth of peace requires that all [governments] agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament."

He continued: "With development needs across the globe far outpacing the resources being devoted to address them, the thought of pouring hundreds of billions of additional dollars into the world's nuclear arsenals is nothing short of sinful."

"It is the grossest misplacement of priorities and truly constitutes the very "theft from the poor" which the Second Vatican Council condemned so long ago."

India native Chullikatt, who served as the apostolic nuncio to Iraq and Jordan from 2006 until his appointment to the U.N. post last year, said that the current phase-out of nuclear weapons, built on treaties between Russia and the United States, has been insufficient and, indeed, has led to permanent nuclear weapons deterrence systems.

"It cannot be considered morally sufficient to draw down the stocks of superfluous nuclear weapons while modernizing nuclear arsenals and investing vast sums to ensure their future production and maintenance," the archbishop said. "This current course will ensure the perpetuation of these weapons indefinitely."

Chullikatt called for a new, comprehensive effort through the United Nations to address nuclear weapons disarmament.

"It is becoming ever clearer that nuclear disarmament must be addressed from a comprehensive approach," he said. "Despite steps for decades, we still have a profusion of nuclear weapons. The Holy See believes there needs to be a binding together of steps into a coherent commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons in clearly defined phases for an incremental disarmament."

The new Kansas City facility is one of several where new nuclear weapons projects are under way. The new Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project at Los Alamos, N.M., is also under construction, and a new uranium processing facility in Oak Ridge, Tenn., is in the final stages before approval.

The archbishop ended his address by comparing the quest for a world free of nuclear weapons to the struggle for the abolition of slavery.

"In the end, slavery was brought to an end," he said.

"A world without nuclear weapons is not only possible, it has now become urgent," he said.

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