

Pope in Nagasaki: No to atomic weapons, deterrence doctrine

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Pope Francis delivers his speech with his cape blown by wind, at the Martyrsâ€™™ Monument at Nishizaka Hill Sunday, Nov. 24, 2019, in Nagasaki, Japan. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

Nagasaki: Pope Francis demanded world leaders renounce nuclear weapons and the Cold War-era doctrine of mutual deterrence, saying Sunday the arms race decreases security, wastes resources and threatens humanity with catastrophic destruction.

Francis made the appeal in Nagasaki at ground zero of the second of the two 1945 US atomic bombings on Japan. After laying a wreath of flowers and praying in the rain at the foot of the memorial to the victims, Francis said the place stands as a stark reminder “of the pain and horror that we human beings are capable of inflicting upon one another.”

“Convinced as I am that a world without nuclear weapons is possible and necessary, I ask political leaders not to forget that these weapons cannot protect us from current threats to national and international security,” he said.

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Francis visited Nagasaki “ and later Hiroshima “ at the start of his three-day trip to Japan aimed at emphasizing his call for a global ban on atomic weapons.

The Holy See was among the first countries to sign and ratify the new nuclear prohibition treaty, and Francis himself has gone further than any pope before him in saying not only the use, but the mere possession of atomic weapons is “to be condemned.”

Francis didnâ€™™t repeat that condemnation on Sunday, but he argued that stockpiling nuclear arsenals provides a false sense of security and actually reduces global peace at a time of heightened concerns about the nuclear threat from Iran and North Korea.

“Peace and international stability are incompatible with attempts to build upon the fear of mutual destruction or the threat of total annihilation,” he said.

“They can be achieved only on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation.” Several years ago, Francis was given a photograph of a Nagasaki boy carrying his dead baby brother on his back en route to a crematorium after the bombing. Francis has since distributed tens of thousands of copies of the photo, with the words “The fruit of war,” printed on them.

On Sunday, a poster-sized version of the photo was displayed at the memorial, and Francis was meeting the widow and son of the American military photographer who shot it, Joe Oâ€™™Donnell.

The first US atomic bombing on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, killed 140,000 people, and the second one dropped three days later on Nagasaki killed another 74,000 by the end of the same year, according to data from the cities. Many of the survivors have suffered the lasting impact of radiation and developed various forms of cancer.

Under the 1957 government law designed to support A-bomb survivors, or "hibakusha," more than 370,000 people were recognized as eligible for various types of government support, including medical and welfare assistance depending on how far they were from the ground zero.

As of 2018, the total amount the government had spent on them amounted to nearly 5.6 trillion yen (USD 53 billion), according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

Francis lamented the "climate of distrust" that is eating away at non-proliferation efforts and the arms control framework, a reference to the formal demise this year of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty, a landmark Cold War-era arms control agreement.

The US formally withdrew from the treaty in August, after accusing Moscow of developing a Russian missile system prohibited under it.

"In a world where millions of children and families live in inhumane conditions, the money that is squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading, maintenance and sale of ever more destructive weapons, are an affront crying out to heaven," Francis said.

And he urged world powers to recommit to arms control efforts and the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons.

"We need to ponder the catastrophic impact of their deployment, especially from a humanitarian and environmental standpoint, and reject heightening a climate of fear, mistrust and hostility fomented by nuclear doctrines," he said.

- AP