

UN Secretary General's May 2018 Appeal to Nuclear Powers:
Resume Negotiations to Reduce Nuclear Arms

Interfaith Statement of Support

We, the undersigned members of religious communities, strongly support the appeal by the Secretary General of the United Nations for an immediate resumption of arms reduction negotiations among the world's nuclear powers.

We believe that the time is long overdue for the elimination of nuclear weapons, and we believe that recent developments make it essential that the issue receive prompt and urgent attention.

We affirm the view previously expressed by many religious authorities that nuclear weapons are inherently immoral because of their horrific and indiscriminate effects on civilians and on the environment. Similar statements have also been made by, among others, the International Court of Justice and the International Red Cross/Red Crescent.

Further, recent scientific research indicates that the disastrous effects of any nuclear conflict would extend far beyond the immediate millions of deaths caused by blast, fire, and radiation. The climate disruption caused by the smoke and soot from nuclear fire storms could result in temperatures not seen since the last Ice Age, threatening the possible extinction of humanity, and even a limited, regional nuclear war could result in global famine putting billions of people at risk. There can be no moral or religious justification for continuing to subject humankind and the planet to this kind of danger.

Under the Non-proliferation Treaty entered in force in 1970, the nuclear weapons states committed themselves to negotiating nuclear disarmament and the elimination of their arsenals. They appear, however, to have relegated the achievement of that goal to an uncertain date in the distant future, perhaps not within the lifetime of present government leaders. The immediate peril created by nuclear weapons makes indefinite delay morally unacceptable.

Several times already the world has come within minutes of accidental nuclear war through human or computer error, and at least one of these incidents occurred years after the end of the Cold War. International military experts, and a recent report by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, have warned that the danger is now increasing because of developments in military technology. New delivery systems, which are more rapid and harder to detect, are shortening warning and decision times, thus increasing the danger of war and devastation by accident or miscalculation. Weapons with greater accuracy and lower yield risk lowering the threshold for actual use. Several past nuclear false alarms have fortuitously been resolved by human judgment and intervention in incidents that were incorrectly identified by computers as nuclear attacks, and the increased reliance on automation will introduce new points of vulnerability.

Delay also increases the danger of nuclear proliferation. Under the Non-proliferation Treaty, which entered into force more than forty years ago, the non-nuclear weapons states agreed not to acquire these armaments in exchange for a commitment by the nuclear powers to negotiate genuine disarmament. Continuing delay in meeting that commitment is placing increased pressure on the entire non-proliferation regime.

In addition to the dangers of accidental war, terrorism, and proliferation, it would be unwise to ignore the risk that confrontation among nuclear powers could easily escalate out of control. It is sobering to recall that in World War I the world's major powers drifted and blundered into a war which none of them wanted and which was ruinous for all of them.

For the sake of the entire human family, we join the United Nations in urging the nuclear weapon states to resume arms control negotiations without further delay.