



Statement by Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Head of Delegation of the Holy See, during the general discussion of Main Committee III of the Tenth Review Conference of the of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

8 August 2022

Madam Chair,

The Holy See holds that atomic energy must only be used for peaceful purposes. In reviewing the operation of Article IV of the Treaty, which reaffirms the “inalienable right” of parties to develop the peaceful use of nuclear energy, since the NPT entered into force, the global fleet of nuclear power reactors has expanded from 82 to 440, now making up a fifth of the world’s low-carbon power, crucial to the fight against climate change.

The Holy See takes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the IAEA and urges State Members to strengthen support for the Agency. As our common home experiences the impact of the environmental crisis, addressing food and water shortages are critical, particularly for the world’s most poor and vulnerable. Nuclear technology has contributed to sustainable development by treating cancer, improving crop yields, managing and protecting water supplies, and monitoring ocean pollution. Capacity building partnerships between developing countries and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have enabled nearly all States to benefit from such applications.

Madam Chair,

Despite these accomplishments, the spread of nuclear technology has not occurred without problems, and some very grave problems. Ensuring the peaceful use of nuclear energy means that nuclear energy, medicine, and research facilities must not be targeted in war, which could turn such sites into sources of proliferation, create “dirty bombs,” or radiologically contaminate local communities and the environment, harming present and future generations. In light of this, the Holy See first recalls that Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions prohibits attacks against nuclear power plants and urges that the protection of civilian objects be kept high on the international agenda, including the protection of nuclear facilities. Such

efforts must also respond to the secondary consequences of war and conflict, which linger long after guns fall silent.

Secondly, in protecting our common home, the peaceful uses of nuclear technologies must be considered in an integral fashion, not with a siloed, technocratic approach. Pursuing integral human development requires addressing the social, environmental, and health impacts of technologies. “The true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*.”¹

Faced with, as Pope Francis has noted, “one complex crisis which is both social and environmental”, the international community must invent new, circular methods of production and consumption which do not harm the poor and the planet.² “Each year hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive... The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth... Frequently no measures are taken until after people’s health has been irreversibly affected.”³ The peaceful uses of atomic energy must avoid an approach that “proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others.”⁴

Potential new inventions in nuclear energy suggest the promise of providing climate-neutral energy without harmful impacts to health, the environment, and future generations. Furthermore, States parties should take steps to remediate environments negatively affected by nuclear accidents and uranium mining, assist communities suffering from such effects, and agree on long-term storage solutions for high-level radioactive waste.

Third, States must work together in pursuing the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. In this regard, the Holy See welcomes the opening of the IAEA Low Enriched Uranium Bank in Kazakhstan and calls for greater efforts to multilateralize the nuclear fuel cycle, especially those portions of which pose the greatest threats to proliferation.

¹ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, 49.

² Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, 139.

³ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, 21.

⁴ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, 24 May 2015, 20.

Madam Chair,

Current and future generations “deserve a peaceful world order based on the unity of the human family, grounded on respect, cooperation, solidarity and compassion. Now is the time to counter the logic of fear with the ethic of responsibility, and so foster a climate of trust and sincere dialogue.”⁵

Thank you, Madam Chair.

⁵ Pope Francis, Message on the Occasion of the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, 2014.