

**The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace**  
**A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops**  
**on the Tenth Anniversary of The Challenge of Peace**

*Ten years after issuing *The Challenge of Peace* the National Conference of Catholic Bishops reviewed the findings of the 1983 pastoral letter and offered their reflections. *The Harvest of Justice* is available on the web site of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The section dealing with nuclear disarmament is presented below with permission.*

1. Unfinished Business: Nuclear Disarmament and Proliferation Our 1983 pastoral letter focused special attention on the morality of nuclear weapons at a time of widespread fear of nuclear war. Only ten years later, the threat of global nuclear war may seem more remote than at any time in the nuclear age, but we may be facing a different but still dangerous period in which the use of nuclear weapons remains a significant threat. We cannot address questions of war and peace today, therefore, without acknowledging that the nuclear question remains of vital political and moral significance.

The end of the Cold War has changed the nuclear question in three ways. First, nuclear weapons are still an integral component of U.S. security policies, but they are no longer at the center of these policies or of international relations. In 1983, a dominant concern was the ethics of nuclear weapons. Today, this concern, while still critically important, must be considered in the context of a more fundamental question of the ethical foundations of political order: How do we achieve *Pacem in Terris*' vision of a just and stable political order, so that nations will no longer rely on nuclear weapons for their security? Second, we have new opportunities to take steps toward progressive nuclear disarmament. In 1983, the first task was to stop the growth of already bloated nuclear arsenals; today, the moral task is to proceed with deep cuts and ultimately to abolish these weapons entirely. Third, the threat of global nuclear war has been replaced by a threat of global nuclear proliferation. In addition to the declared nuclear powers, a number of other countries have or could very quickly deploy nuclear weapons, and still other nations, or even terrorist groups, might seek to obtain or develop nuclear weapons. Just as the nuclear powers must prevent nuclear war, so also they, with the rest of the international community, bear a heavy moral responsibility to stop the spread of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

- a. *The Moral Judgment on Deterrence.* In 1983, we judged that nuclear deterrence may be morally acceptable as long as it is limited to deterring nuclear use by others; sufficiency, not nuclear superiority, is its goal; and it is used as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament.<sup>29</sup>

Some believe that this judgment remains valid, since significant progress has been made in reducing nuclear weapons, including the most destabilizing ones, while at least some of those that remain are still necessary to deter existing nuclear threats. Others point to the end of the Soviet threat and the apparent unwillingness of the nuclear powers to accept the need to eliminate nuclear weapons as reasons for abandoning our strictly conditioned moral acceptance of nuclear deterrence. They also cite the double standard inherent in nonproliferation efforts: What is the moral basis for asking other nations to forego nuclear weapons if we continue to judge our own deterrent to be morally necessary? We believe our judgment of 1983 that nuclear deterrence is morally acceptable only under certain strict conditions remains a useful guide for evaluating the continued moral status of nuclear weapons in a post-Cold War world. It is useful because it acknowledges the fundamental moral dilemmas still posed by nuclear weapons, and it reflects the progress toward fulfilling the conditions we elaborated in 1983. At the same time, it highlights the new prospects - and thus the added moral urgency - of making even more dramatic progress in arms control and disarmament as the only basis for the continued moral legitimacy of deterrence.

- b. *A Post-Cold War Agenda For Nuclear Disarmament.* While significant progress has been made in recent years, we believe additional steps are needed if nuclear policies and priorities are to keep up with the dramatic changes in world politics and if our nation is to move away from relying on nuclear deterrence as a basis for its security. Present challenges include the following:
- c. *The Role of Nuclear Weapons:* We must continue to say No to the very idea of nuclear war. A minimal nuclear deterrent may be justified only to deter the use of nuclear weapons. The United States should commit itself never to use nuclear weapons first, should unequivocally reject proposals to use nuclear weapons to deter any nonnuclear threats, and should reinforce the fragile barrier against the use of these weapons. Indeed, we abhor any use of nuclear weapons.
- d. *Arms Control and Disarmament:* Nuclear deterrence may be justified only as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament. The end of the Cold War, according to the Holy See, "challenge[s] the world community to adopt a post-nuclear form of security. That security lies in the abolition of nuclear weapons and the strengthening of international law."<sup>30</sup> A first step toward this goal would be prompt ratification and implementation of the START I and START II treaties. Even once these treaties are fully implemented, there will still be more than 10,000 nuclear weapons in the world, containing explosive power hundreds of thousands times greater than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Therefore, much deeper cuts are both possible and necessary. The eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is more than a moral ideal; it should be a policy goal.

The negotiation of a verifiable comprehensive test ban treaty would not only demonstrate our commitment to this goal, but also would improve our moral credibility in urging nonnuclear nations to forego the development of nuclear weapons. We, therefore, support a halt to nuclear testing as our nation pursues an effective global test ban and renewal of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Also, steps must be taken to reduce the threat of nuclear terrorism. We must reverse the spread of nuclear technologies and materials. We welcome, therefore, U.S. efforts to achieve a global ban on the production of fissionable materials for use in nuclear weapons. Finally, one should not underestimate the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency as a forum for the discussion of these issues and as a force encouraging nations to take the steps necessary in this area.

- e. *Cooperative Security and a Just International Order:* The nuclear powers may justify, and then only temporarily, their nuclear deterrents only if they use their power and resources to lead in the construction of a more just and stable international order. An essential part of this international order must be a collective security framework that reverses the proliferation of nuclear weapons, guarantees the security of nonnuclear states and ultimately seeks to make nuclear weapons and war itself obsolete. The United States and other nations should also make the investments necessary to help ensure the development of stable, democratic governments in nations which have nuclear weapons or might seek to obtain them. An active commitment by the United States to nuclear disarmament and the strengthening of collective security is the only moral basis for temporarily retaining our deterrent and our insistence that other nations forego these weapons. We advocate disarmament by example: careful but clear steps to reduce and end our dependence on weapons of mass destruction.

In our five-year report on *The Challenge of Peace*, we said: "To contain the nuclear danger of our time is itself an awesome undertaking. To reshape the political fabric of an increasingly interdependent world is an even larger and more complicated challenge."<sup>31</sup> Now, on this tenth anniversary, we must be engaged in the difficult task of envisioning a future rooted in peace, with new institutions for resolving differences between nations, new global structures of mediation and conflict-resolution and a world order that has moved beyond nuclear weapons once and for all. We are committed to join in this struggle, to bring the Gospel message of justice and peace to this vital work.