

"There Has Been Regression"

Address by Monsignor Francis Chullikat, deputy head of a Holy See delegation to the United Nations, to the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in New York on April 10, 2002.

Mr. Chairman, as the international community begins preparation for the 2005 Review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, my Delegation notes the deep concern that is widely felt about the state of nuclear disarmament.

At the 2000 Review, it was felt that progress was being made. The Review obtained a clear-cut commitment from the nuclear weapon states that systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI would include: "An unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapon states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all states parties are committed under Article VI."

This commitment was embodied in a list of 13 practical steps the conference unanimously agreed to take. However, the progress made in implementing the 13 steps over the past two years has been indeed discouraging. In fact, the prospects for future implementation are alarming.

As an examination of the 13 steps shows, there has not only been a lack of sufficient progress, there has been regression. Although, thankfully, there has been no nuclear testing in this period, the entry-into-force of the CTBT cannot be seen on the near horizon. The Conference on Disarmament is paralyzed. One of the parties to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty has given notice of withdrawal. Nuclear weapons are still kept on alert status. The admonition of the International Court of Justice for the completion of negotiations towards elimination is ignored.

Even more serious than the lack of progress is the overt determination of some nuclear weapon states to maintain nuclear weapons in a critical role in their military doctrines. While the international community rightly welcomes the willingness of those with the most nuclear weapons to reduce their stocks of operationally deployed warheads, what is the real effect of such unilateral disarmament when it is not made irreversible, i.e., when such stocks can be remounted again quickly?

My Delegation is deeply concerned about the old posture of nuclear deterrence that is evolving into the possibility of use in new strategies. This must be stoutly resisted. The Holy See has constantly recalled the fact that the strategy of deterrence can be envisaged only as a stage in the process aimed at disarmament, even of a progressive nature. So long as it is taken as an end in itself, deterrence encourages the protagonists to ensure a constant superiority over one another, in ceaseless race of over-arming.

Mr. Chairman, the concern of the Holy See mounts in seeing the non-proliferation regime, with the NPT as its cornerstone, in disarray. The old policies of nuclear deterrence, which prevailed in the Cold War, must lead now to concrete disarmament measures. The rule of law cannot countenance the continuation of doctrines that hold nuclear weapons as essential.

There can be no moral acceptance of military doctrines that embody the permanence of nuclear weapons. That is why Pope John Paul II has called for the banishment of all nuclear weapons through "a workable system for negotiation, even of arbitration." Those nuclear weapon states resisting negotiations should therefore be strongly urged to finally come to the negotiating table.

In fact, in clinging to their outmoded rationales for nuclear deterrence, they are denying the most ardent aspirations of humanity as well as the opinion of the highest legal authority in the world. In this regard, my Delegation wishes to reaffirm its well-known position: nuclear weapons are incompatible with the peace we seek for the 21st century; they cannot be justified. These weapons are instruments of death and destruction. The preservation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty demands unequivocal action towards their elimination. Only when such a noble goal is attained can the international community be assured that nations are acting in "good faith".

Mr. Chairman, my Delegation is confident that the Preparatory Committee will seize this opportunity to develop a sharpened sense of urgency to root out nuclear weapons that are the biggest threat to mankind. To keep developing weapon systems that can jeopardize the natural structure upon which all civilization rests seriously undermines the genuine quest of the family of nations to build a culture of peace for the present and future generations.