

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

March 10, 2010

Dear Mr. President,

Greetings of peace. As you move to finalize your Nuclear Posture Review we would like to share our deep concerns over the moral implications of the direction you are about to set. Your speech in Prague ignited the imagination and raised the hopes of the entire world. We share that hope and encourage you to move forward with fundamental changes to the posture of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

As moral leaders and particularly as Catholic leaders, we have worked for decades to end the wasteful policies that place nuclear weapons at the center of our national security strategy. Over \$50 billion are spent each and every year on maintaining and deploying our nuclear deterrent. We are deeply concerned over your Administration's request to increase spending on preserving our ability to use these horrendous weapons.

Rather, we urge you to move our nation beyond indefinite deterrence and embrace elimination as the fundamental posture of U.S. nuclear weapons policy. Such a transformational shift would set our nation on a course to lead the very effort you spoke of in Prague: *"And as a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act. We cannot succeed in this endeavor alone, but we can lead it, we can start it."*

A shift away from indefinite deterrence is exactly what our tradition seeks. The Holy See expressed this in unequivocal terms at the 2005 Review Conference of the Nonproliferation Treaty: *"When the Holy See expressed its limited acceptance of nuclear deterrence during the Cold War, it was with the clearly stated condition that deterrence was only a step on the way towards progressive nuclear disarmament. The Holy See has never countenanced nuclear deterrence as a permanent measure, nor does it today when it is evident that nuclear deterrence drives the development of ever newer nuclear arms, thus preventing genuine nuclear disarmament."*

We recognize that embracing a policy of elimination is only the first step on the long road to outlawing these weapons under an international treaty with robust verification measures. However, **we believe that the time has come for the United States to bring its nuclear policy in line with its existing commitments under the Nonproliferation Treaty.** The World Court has been clear that under the NPT "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control." The NPR can signal to the world that the United States takes seriously its commitments under international law and is prepared to lead a genuine international effort to fulfill its NPT obligations.

We further recognize that while such a process is underway, the United States will retain a nuclear deterrent. **During this interim period it is essential that the role that these weapons serve be strictly limited to deterring the use of nuclear weapons against the United States or its allies.** From our moral perspective, coupling such a declaration with a clear policy of elimination is the only possible way of maintaining any legitimacy under international law. In Prague you said: *“So today, I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.”* An unambiguous policy that strictly limits the role of these weapons while your Administration leads an international effort to eliminate them is crucial if the United States is to convince would-be proliferators that nuclear weapons offer them no utility or security in the 21st century.

Similarly, **the NPR can strengthen the United States’ efforts to lead the world in eliminating nuclear weapons by ending the deployment of its remaining tactical nuclear weapons from Europe.** Our NATO allies are asking for precisely such a step. These weapons serve no legitimate purpose and do not enhance the security of the United States or our NATO allies. Yet their continued deployment sends a powerful signal to proliferators that indeed, the most developed nations of the world rely on nuclear weapons for their security. Removing these unnecessary weapons is a small but crucial step in fulfilling the vision set forth in Prague and we urge you to do so without delay.

Finally, and in keeping with the spirit of your Prague vision, **we urge you to end the most dangerous aspect of our current nuclear posture: the maintaining of these weapons on hair-trigger alert.** No single action taken today can better enhance our security and move the world in the direction of the nuclear weapons free future you envision than to end the Cold War posture of our nuclear arsenal. The threat of accidental launch or misinterpreted radar data can have devastating consequences, particularly given the decayed state of Russian early warning systems. Committing the U.S. to de-alerting its arsenal and negotiating reciprocity from Russia under a new START will remove the nuclear sword of Damocles that has hung over our nation for half a century.

Mr. President, we share your vision for a world without nuclear weapons and you may be assured of our support in all your efforts to make that vision a reality. We know it will not be easy and there are countless barriers to achieving it. Nonetheless, we believe that the vision you set forth is the right one and we will work with you as long as it takes to achieve it. Your Administration has taken seriously its commitment to transparency. **In closing we ask you to break from the past and make the Nuclear Posture Review public.** The world is ready to follow the leadership you offered in Prague. We urge you to begin to exercise that leadership by embracing a fundamental reorientation of our nuclear posture away from indefinite deterrence and toward elimination and to make that the public policy of the United States.

Respectfully,

Bishop Gabino Zavala, President, Pax Christi USA

Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, former President, Pax Christi USA
Bishop Walter F. Sullivan, former President, Pax Christi USA
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