For a world free of nuclear weapons

Mr. President,

The General Assembly resolution calling for today's High-Level meeting on Nuclear Disarmament expressed the common conviction that the complete elimination of nuclear weapons is essential to remove the danger of nuclear war, a goal that must have our highest priority. The Holy See, which has long called for the banishment of these weapons of mass destruction, joins in this concerted effort to give vigorous expression to the cry of humanity to be freed from the specter of nuclear warfare.

Under the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, states are enjoined to make "good faith" efforts to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons. Can we say there is "good faith" when modernization programs of the nuclear weapons states continue despite their affirmations of eventual nuclear disarmament? Concern over the proliferation of nuclear weapons into other countries ring hollow as long as the nuclear weapons states hold on to their nuclear weapons. If today's special meeting is to have any historic significance, it must result in a meaningful commitment by the nuclear weapons states to divest themselves of their nuclear weapons.

Five years ago, the Secretary-General offered a Five-Point Plan for Nuclear Disarmament. It is past time for this plan to be given the serious attention it deserves. The centre-piece is the negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention or a framework of instruments leading directly to a global ban on nuclear weapons. This is a clear-cut goal, fully understandable and supportable by all those who truly want the world to move beyond the dark doctrines of mutual assured destruction.

It is now imperative for us to address in a systematic and coherent manner the legal, political and

technical requisites for a world free from nuclear arms. For this reason, we should begin as soon as possible preparatory work on the Convention or a framework agreement for a phased and verifiable elimination of nuclear arms.

The chief obstacle to starting this work is continued adherence to the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. With the end of the Cold War, the time for the acceptance of this doctrine is long passed. The Holy See does not countenance the continuation of nuclear deterrence, since it is evident it is driving the development of ever newer nuclear arms, thus preventing genuine nuclear disarmament.

For many years, the world has been told that a number of steps will lead eventually to nuclear disarmament. Such argumentation is belied by the extraordinary nature of today's meeting, which surely would not have been called if the steps were working. They are not. It is the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence, politically supported by the nuclear weapons states, that must be addressed in order to break the chain of dependence on deterrence. Starting work on a global approach to providing security without relying on nuclear deterrence is urgent.

We cannot justify the continuation of a permanent nuclear deterrence policy, given the loss of human, financial and material resources in time of scarcity of funds for health, education and social services around the world and in the face of current threats to human security, such as poverty, climate change, terrorism and transnational crimes. All this should make us consider the ethical dimension and the moral legitimacy of the production, processing, development, accumulation, use and threat of use of nuclear arms. We must emphasize anew that military doctrines based on nuclear arms, as instruments of security and defence of an élite group, in a show of power and supremacy, retard and jeopardize the process of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

It is time to counter the logic of fear with the ethic of responsibility, fostering a climate of trust and sincere dialogue, capable of promoting a culture of peace, founded on the primacy of law and the common good, through a coherent and responsible cooperation between all members of the international community.

Thank you, Mr. President.

L'Osservatore Romano