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## Closing Keynote at the Catholic Peacebuilding in Times of Crisis: Hope for a Wounded World Conference

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**Closing Keynote**  
**at the Catholic Peacebuilding in Times of Crisis: Hope for a Wounded World Conference**  
**June 23, 2022**  
**H.E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia**  
**Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations**

Dear participants,

I trust that the past few days have enabled you to learn from one another's diverse experiences as you seek to build peace around the world. Though today's challenges are daunting, gatherings such as this—and the fruitful exchanges they produce—help sow the seeds of future peace.

I would first like to thank Professor Jerry Powers in his capacity as Coordinator of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, as well as the other co-sponsors of this conference, for inviting me to speak. Your tireless efforts enrich our understanding of how to build peace in the Catholic tradition.

**Challenges to Peace**

As the title of this conference highlights, we live in times of crisis, the likes of which we have not seen for almost three quarters of a century. A string of conflicts across Africa, from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, have halted and reversed development gains, with untold suffering. In the Middle East, millions continue to suffer in Syria and Yemen, with more people in need than at any point since those conflicts began. Finally, in South-East Asia, widespread conflict has returned to Myanmar following last year's coup, eroding democratic gains made over the past decade and raising the risk of intercommunal violence.

In a March meeting of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, Secretary-General António Guterres noted that the world is “facing the highest number of violent conflicts since 1945,” with two billion people—one quarter of humanity—living in conflict-affected areas.<sup>1</sup> In the face of such statistics, it is all too tempting to divert our attention away from such suffering and abandon the pursuit of peace.

It is not only active conflicts that concern us. Despite the need to respond to global issues of a transnational nature—such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and migration—States continue to inject untold sums into their militaries. By one count, 2021 marked the first time that global military expenditures have surpassed \$2 trillion.<sup>2</sup> At a time when more than 274 million of

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<sup>1</sup> UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Remarks to the Peacebuilding Commission on the Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, 30 March 2022, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2022-03-30/remarks-peacebuilding-commission-report-peacebuilding-and-sustaining-peace%C2%A0>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time>

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our brothers and sisters require humanitarian assistance, such military expenditures steal food from the mouths of the hungry and blankets from the backs of the cold.<sup>3</sup>

In no area is the world's military buildup more concerning than that of nuclear weapons. While the five permanent members of the UN Security Council reaffirmed in January the Reagan-Gorbachev Principle that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought", their actions do not match their rhetoric. Far from reducing their reliance on nuclear deterrence strategies, the P5 have found themselves engaged in an arms race as they modernize and, in some cases, expand their arsenals. Unlike during the Cold War, when such issues drew widespread attention from civil society and the public, the new arms race takes place in relative secret, insulating decision-makers from pressure to adopt policies of nuclear restraint.

As if these crises were not enough to address, we have seen the return of full-scale interstate war to Europe, a phenomenon once thought consigned to history. In the early days of the conflict in Ukraine, when the Security Council failed to respond in a meaningful way due to the use of the veto, not a few of my fellow ambassadors asked earnestly whether the United Nations will go the way of the League of Nations, having failed in its primary mission "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the question begs our consideration, as the war risks engulfing conflicts long viewed as frozen in negative peace and raises the specter of nuclear escalation.

Amid this widespread conflict, growing military spending, and increasing risk of nuclear war, a final challenge confronts us: an apathy to the ills of the world inculcated by national media environments that invite us to look only inward, oblivious to the common challenges facing humanity. Pope Francis speaks of such "indifference" in his Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, noting that "the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia".<sup>5</sup> As peacebuilders, this apathy means we must work not only to engage parties to conflict, but also to raise awareness among the public and policymakers that today's widespread conflict has global implications and concerns us all.

Having surveyed the challenges to peace we face around the globe, I would now like to turn to the Holy See's vision of peace, including the role played by international institutions, such as the United Nations.

### **Towards a Positive, Just Peace**

In his 2020 New Year's address to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis declared that "peace and integral human development are in fact the principal aim of the Holy See in its involvement in the field of diplomacy".<sup>6</sup> His Holiness's use of the singular "aim" in his formulation is insightful, as it reflects that according to Catholic social

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<sup>3</sup> <https://gho.unocha.org>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Charter: Preamble, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble>.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 3 October 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html), 70.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/january/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200109\\_corpo-diplomatico.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/january/documents/papa-francesco_20200109_corpo-diplomatico.html).

teaching, peace and development cannot be siloed as distinct pursuits, they are two sides of the same coin—processes that reinforce one another.

Indeed, the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (“Joy and Hope”), characterizes peace as a process, interwoven with the “common good of humanity”. It goes on to note that “peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly” given that “the concrete demands of this common good are constantly changing as time goes on”.<sup>7</sup> In addition to linking peace to the common good, *Gaudium et Spes* highlights that peace can never be separated from justice, which “results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder.”<sup>8</sup> From this document, we have the building blocks of the Holy See’s vision of peace, the twin pursuits of integral human development and justice.

Achieving a positive peace based on justice and development is beyond the capability of any one State, no matter how powerful. As we well know, a negative peace imposed by force cannot hope to be sustainable, even if it facilitates development, as such a peace often contributes to grievances that form the basis for future conflict. Despite the changes in international relations over the past three quarters of a century—which have featured the rise in importance of armed non-State actors, non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations—States remain the primary actors on the world stage and thus primarily hold the key to obviating all kinds of conflict. To make progress toward this end, States must act in concert, choosing cooperation over competition.

Of course, our best hope for such progress lies with the United Nations, despite its imperfections. The organization’s four pillars—peace, human rights, development, and the rule of law—strongly align with the Holy See’s aim of just peace and integral human development. *Gaudium et Spes* again proves instructive here, as it contends that the abolition of war rests upon “the establishment of some universal public authority acknowledged as such by all and endowed with the power to safeguard on the behalf of all, security, regard for justice, and respect for rights”.<sup>9</sup> Owing to the organization’s limited track record in 1965, due in part to the bipolar tensions of the Cold War, the pastoral constitution does not mention the UN by name, however, it is around this time that the Holy See first involved itself with the organization as an Observer under my predecessor, Monsignor Alberto Giovannetti.

The influence of Pope Saint John XXIII, a former member of the diplomatic corps, in the decision for the Holy See to engage with the UN should not be underestimated, although he passed away nine months before the establishment of the Observer Mission. In his 1963 Encyclical Letter, *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII considered the establishment of the UN, praising it for passing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which he viewed as “an approach toward the establishment of a juridical and political ordering of the world community”, which derived from

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<sup>7</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), 78.

<sup>8</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), 78.

<sup>9</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), 81.

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the dignity of the human person.<sup>10</sup> Along with this praise, John XXIII also highlighted the need for reform, expressing the “earnest wish” that the UN could “adapt its structure and methods of operation to the magnitude and nobility of its tasks”.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent pontiffs would return to this theme, acknowledging that the UN is constantly in need of reform to carry out its mission.

In no area under its purview has the UN enacted greater reform than in the conduct of peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding. These reforms have helped move the UN closer to the Holy See’s vision of peacebuilding by aiming to protect civilians, promote human rights, and build the rule of law. Unlike during the Cold War, when UN peacekeeping operations narrowly focused on freezing conflicts in a negative peace, today’s multidimensional peacekeeping missions take a more expansive view of conflict, recognizing that peace cannot be separated from development and justice.

Of course, the UN, as a large, bureaucratic organization, was slow to implement these changes, which followed high-profile failures of peacekeeping missions toward the end of the last century. In many cases, the UN merely acted as a guarantor of peace built by non-governmental organizations. An example comes to mind of a Catholic lay association which was involved with providing charitable and social services in a zone of conflict. This activity established the association as a trustworthy interlocutor, enabling it to promote encounter and dialogue among parties to the conflict. This, in turn, led to a peaceful outcome being brokered. Such an example aligns with the ethic of solidarity, defined by Pope Saint John Paul II as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual”.<sup>12</sup>

The reform of the peace pillar has improved the UN’s ability to respond to fragile situations around the world. Most important in this regard is the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2005, which convenes member States of all three principal UN organs, as well as relevant non-State actors involved in post-conflict peacebuilding and conflict prevention. As part of its mandate, the Peacebuilding Commission promotes an integrated approach that recognizes the connections between security, development, and human rights. By breaking down the bureaucratic barriers separating the UN’s work in these areas, the Commission has the greatest potential to address the needs of the common good when seeking to promote peace, allowing the UN better to complement the work of non-governmental organizations involved in peacemaking processes.

### **A Future for UN Peacebuilding?**

The work of the Peacebuilding Commission is more vital than ever. In addition to a multitude of active conflicts, the present global landscape features numerous fragile States and those recovering from conflict. Due to competition with the plethora of crises the world now faces, many peacebuilding matters rarely reach the agenda of the Security Council. In some ways, this is a

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<sup>10</sup> Pope John XXIII, encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April 1963, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html), 143-145.

<sup>11</sup> Pope John XXIII, encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris*, 11 April 1963, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html), 145.

<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, encyclical letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 30 December 1987, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html), 38.

blessing in disguise, as it insulates them from the intractable differences between the Council's permanent members, which have mired the Council in inaction on important subjects such as Syria, Ukraine, and Myanmar.

Despite challenges at the Security Council, the wider UN system has recognized the importance and effectiveness of peacebuilding. This year, the Secretary-General has set a target of \$500 million per year to be distributed through his Peacebuilding Fund—more than double of what the fund distributed last year—and has called upon States to approve the allocation of assessed contributions to the fund, which will set peacebuilding efforts on a more sustainable fiscal path. Such an increase in funds, if approved, will provide numerous opportunities for the UN to collaborate with other peacebuilding organizations. It will also earn a substantial peace dividend, as research shows that every dollar invested in peacebuilding reduces the cost of conflict by \$16.<sup>13</sup> Such potential gives hope that despite setbacks, the UN is on the path to building positive peace around the world.

While it is easy to become disheartened due to today's immense challenges, we must take solace in the fact that the crises faced by earlier generations eventually contributed to positive change. The horrors of the Second World War led to the creation of the UN itself and the threat of nuclear annihilation illustrated by the Cuban Missile Crisis led to a system of arms control and risk reduction that has improved global security, albeit at a level far below where we would hope. Although it may take decades, the uncoordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic and inaction in the face of the war in Ukraine will stimulate further reforms that can bring the UN closer to being the "universal public authority" envisioned by Catholic social teaching. Such reforms, as noted by Pope Francis, must include changes that make the Security Council more equitable.<sup>14</sup> Such reforms should certainly involve an expansion in membership and limits on veto power, if not its elimination.

With UN reform forever a work in progress, non-governmental actors, which many of you work through, will continue to play an essential role in building peace.

In closing, I would like to reflect on the importance of solidarity in building peace. We all recall when Pope Francis knelt to kiss the feet of Salva Kiir, Riek Machar, and other South Sudanese leaders during a retreat at the Vatican, imploring them to commit to peace despite differences. In doing so, His Holiness gave us a model to emulate in peacemaking. What we should also remember though, is that it was the patient, discreet work of a Catholic association that laid the groundwork for the retreat, allowing the Holy See to play a role as peacebuilder. As Pope Francis prepares to visit South Sudan next month to see the fruits of the fragile peace that resulted, may we remain conscious of the power of dialogue and accompaniment in creating the space for peace amid the world's too oft-forgotten conflicts.

Thank you for your attention and especially for all that you do to build peace around the world.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/measuring-peacebuilding-cost-effectiveness/>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, 25 September 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150925\\_onu-visita.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html)