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**STATEMENT
MOST REVEREND JOHN C. WESTER
ON WAR IN UKRAINE
Nuclear Weapons Must Be Eliminated, Not Reinforced**

ALBUQUERQUE – Saturday, March 19, 2022—IMMEDIATE RELEASE—Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe has made the following statement on the War in Ukraine:

We watch in horror as a brutal land war erupts, threatening all of Europe, which seems inconceivable after the end of the Cold War some thirty years ago. We pray for the safety and well-being of both Ukrainians and Russians and hope that God's light and our own sanctified work towards justice and redemption can lead us to a lasting peace. In particular, we pray for the multitude of refugees and children who are having their lives destroyed by needless and unjustified violence. No matter what language they speak or which ruler they pledge allegiance to, may the Lord protect all of our brothers and sisters through the grace of God! This has been our intention during the novena for Ukraine that we are currently praying in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

Two months ago I released my pastoral letter *Living in the Light Of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament*.

Considering that letter and given the renewed fear of nuclear war that the Ukraine invasion has prompted, I feel compelled to address the important issue of nuclear disarmament. Some may now argue that I was naïve and that the Russian invasion proves that Ukraine should never have given up the Soviet nuclear weapons deployed on its soil. Some may further argue that the Russian invasion illustrates the fundamental necessity and legitimacy of nuclear weapons to begin with. I vigorously disagree, countering that today's wars only further underscore the moral and legal imperative to eliminate nuclear weapons for all time in a fully multilateral, deliberate, and verifiable manner.

To begin with the obvious, it was Soviet nuclear weapons under Soviet command and control that were deployed on Ukrainian territory, over which Ukraine had little if any operational control and no supporting domestic nuclear weapons program. Along with Belarus and Kazakhstan, Ukraine made the right decision to have Soviet nuclear weapons returned to Russia after the collapse of the USSR. All three countries deserve the highest praise for the greatest act of nuclear weapons nonproliferation in history.

As to the general legitimacy of nuclear weapons, recall that ex-Defense Secretary Robert McNamara observed that only by luck did humanity survive the Cuban Missile Crisis. Moreover, since that time, there have been a number of false alerts that came close to triggering nuclear Armageddon. In addition, we are now aware of potential nuclear winter that could kill billions through starvation. Simply put, there is nothing legitimate about genocidal weapons of mass destruction.

On top of this, today's new nuclear arms race is arguably even more dangerous than the first because of new cyber warfare techniques, hypersonic delivery platforms, and artificial intelligence. We cannot count on humanity's luck to hold out, especially when possibly unhinged or ruthless leaders make irresponsible statements like other countries "could face consequences they have never seen" and "fire and fury like the world has never seen."

I am writing from the heart of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, which is now spearheading a \$1.7 trillion program to "modernize" nuclear weapons and their delivery systems with new military capabilities. A system for keeping nuclear weapons forever is not what the world needs. The national labs within my Archdiocese should, instead, be diligently working on the technical underpinnings for a future world free of nuclear weapons, including advanced warhead detection and monitoring and international accounting of nuclear weapons materials.

As a provisional step toward the global nuclear disarmament mandated by the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty, the U.S. and Russia, which together possess more than 90% of the world's nuclear weapons, should bilaterally decrease their stockpiles to the few hundred needed for just "deterrence" instead of the thousands they deploy for nuclear warfighting.

From there the international community should work diligently toward complete universal, verifiable nuclear disarmament.

Pope Francis declared: "We must never grow weary of working to support the principal international legal instruments of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, including the [new] Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons." As I wrote in my pastoral letter, "it is not enough that we become instruments of peace, as important as that is. No, we must take up the cause of worldwide nuclear disarmament with an urgency that befits the seriousness of this cause and the dangerous threat that looms over all of humanity and the planet."

We pray for an end to war, an end to atrocities.

We pray for a future world free of nuclear weapons. But prayers are not enough. The Russian invasion of Ukraine should end without delay. For lasting peace, Russian security concerns should be genuinely addressed, but not under the threat of a gun. Freedom-loving peoples everywhere should pressure their politicians to halt the new nuclear arms race and take concrete steps towards verifiable global nuclear disarmament. Humanity's very existence is at stake.

May there be peace in Ukraine, may there be peace everywhere. But by the grace of God, peace will break out only if we work assiduously for it. I am honored to be part of that effort and would be very pleased if you were to join me.

Your brother in the Light of Christ's Peace,

Most Reverend John C. Wester
Archbishop of Santa Fe

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