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STATEMENT

IN SUPPORT OF TRINITY TEST DOWNWINDERS

Congress Expands Nuclear Weapons Production But Denies Justice for Historically Impacted New Mexicans

ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Monday, December 11, 2023 – IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

The following is a statement from Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe, on the denial of justice for Historically Impacted New Mexicans.

The combined congressional conference of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees recently rejected expanded compensation for long-suffering victims of nuclear weapons testing and uranium mining. In the State of New Mexico, this denied justice to Trinity Test Downwinders, who are majority people of color. At the same time, the congressional conference authorized spending tens of billions of dollars for expanded production of nuclear weapons when there are already more than needed to end human civilization.

On August 9, 2022, the 77th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, I held a blessing and healing ceremony for a dozen Trinity Test Downwinders in the Basilica Cathedral of St. Francis in downtown Santa Fe. "Santa Fe" means the "Holy Faith" of St. Francis, from whom the Holy Father has drawn his papal name. Pope Francis has declared "the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral."

During this deeply moving healing ceremony, some of the Downwinders were openly weeping, saying finally, we are being heard after generations of cancers. I again offer prayers today for those past cancer deaths but also for those yet to come. Even though atmospheric nuclear weapons testing ended long ago in 1962, future cancer deaths will still far exceed past deaths due to long-lived fallout. Why is it that our government does not inform us of this future suffering while also failing to justly compensate past and present suffering?

On August 9, 2023, I was in Nagasaki, Japan, for the 78th anniversary of its atomic bombing. I co-celebrated Mass at the Urakami Cathedral which was utterly destroyed but rebuilt after the atomic blast. I humbly offered roses from New Mexico's Lady of Guadalupe to the bust of the Madonna of Nagasaki, whose face was literally burned by the plutonium bomb that came from Los Alamos.

My co-celebrants at that Mass were the Archbishops of Seattle and Nagasaki and the Bishop of Hiroshima. That very day, we created a formal partnership of our four dioceses to work on nuclear disarmament. On behalf of that partnership, I have returned from the United Nations in New York City for the Second Meeting of the State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Ninety-three countries have signed that ban treaty, of which 69 have ratified it, with more to come. In contrast, all of the nuclear weapons powers, including the United States, refuse to even recognize it.

What does this mean in the Land of Enchantment? Congress has just authorized the federal Department of Energy to spend \$10 billion during this fiscal year in New Mexico alone, twice that of the next state, Tennessee. Seventy-five percent of that money, \$7.5 billion, will be spent directly on nuclear weapons research and production, while much of the remainder is to dump radioactive and toxic wastes in our state.

In comparison, the operating budget for the entire State of New Mexico for all of its citizens is 6% less at \$9.4 billion. It is we who suffer the environmental contamination and have the nation's only permanent radioactive waste dump at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. And yet Congress fails to compensate the Trinity Test Downwinders. Where is the justice in this? And why is it that despite all of this nuclear weapons money, New Mexico remains among the very poorest of states, with the most children living in poverty and the worst public education?

Expanding nuclear weapons production and in particular plutonium pit production at the Los Alamos Lab, is feeding an accelerating new nuclear arms race that imperils all of humanity. Robert McNamara, Defense Secretary during the Cuban Missile Crisis, said that we survived the first nuclear arms race only by luck. Clearly, luck is not a sustainable survival strategy.

This new nuclear arms race is arguably more dangerous than the first. This is because we now have multiple nuclear actors instead of the Cold War arms race between just the Soviet Union and the United States. Moreover, the nuclear risks are amplified by the rise of cyber and hypersonic weapons and artificial intelligence.

Our blessed Archdiocese of Santa Fe is nevertheless the birthplace of nuclear weapons. It remains the host to two of the nation's three nuclear weapons laboratories, which are the Los Alamos and Sandia Labs. In addition, our archdiocese also hosts the Air Force's Nuclear Weapons Center at the Kirtland Air Force Base, which also has an underground storage depot containing the most nuclear warheads in the country.

Because of all this, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has a special responsibility to encourage the global nuclear disarmament mandated by the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty but never honored by the nuclear weapons states. Moreover, those nuclear weapons states now ignore the new ban treaty. This is despite the fact that other weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological, have long been banned. Global and verifiable nuclear disarmament is a critical pro-life issue because nuclear weapons are the one existential threat that can end civilization overnight.

In closing, I want to thank the New Mexican congressional delegation for their vigorous but unfortunately failed attempt to gain justice and compensation for the Trinity Test Downwinders. I encourage them to embrace this issue again next year, as they undoubtedly will.

But that is not enough. Instead of supporting expanding nuclear weapons programs as jobs programs, the New Mexico congressional delegation should have the courage of vision to promote jobs that accord with Christ's teachings of peace and harmony. At the Los Alamos and Sandia Labs, this could mean genuine, comprehensive cleanup of radioactive and toxic wastes that would permanently protect our precious water resources while providing hundreds of well-paying jobs. In addition, in order to encourage right livelihood, I want to challenge the Labs to develop and field the monitoring and verification technologies that will be essential to underpin a future world free of nuclear weapons.

Let us work diligently to prevent potential new downwinders from the ever-increasing threat of nuclear war. And let's have justice and compensation for our existing Trinity Test Downwinders!

I am eager to work with others toward achieving all of the above.

Yours in the love of Jesus Christ,
Most Reverend John C. Wester
Archbishop of Santa Fe

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