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IACS and UNM to Host Groundbreaking Forum on Nuclear Weapons

Considered the first of its kind since the 1980s, the forum will feature prominent policy makers and thought leaders discussing approaches to nuclear disarmament and deterrence

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M., Aug. 13, 2024 — A groundbreaking discussion in September at the University of New Mexico will feature high-ranking public policy experts, influential spiritual leaders, and prominent academics exploring strategic and ethical responses to one of the most urgent issues facing humanity: the rising threat of nuclear war.

“Forum on Nuclear Strategy: Disarmament & Deterrence in a Dangerous World” will be held from 1:45 p.m. to 5 p.m. (MDT) on Saturday, Sept. 7, 2024 in the university’s Student Union Building Ballroom A. Considered the first of its kind since the American Catholic bishops reshaped the nuclear weapons debate in the 1980s, the forum is led by the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California, the Endowed Chair of Roman Catholic Studies at the University of New Mexico, and UNM’s Religious Studies Program.

“The forum is an important opportunity for experts in religious and secular fields to learn from each other as they explore modern nuclear strategy decisions,” said Most Rev. John C. Wester, Archbishop of Sante Fe, whose 2022 pastoral letter [*Living in the Light of Christ’s Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament*](#) calls for dynamic discussion on nuclear disarmament. “It’s precisely these conversations that will lead to a clearer understanding of the threat that nuclear weapons pose and how best to navigate the waters of the perilous arms race we find ourselves in today.”

The forum will include nuclear experts, policy makers, and the intellectual architects of disarmament and deterrence approaches to nuclear weapons policy from Catholic and secular strategic perspectives discussing solutions aimed at securing long-lasting peace across the globe.

“With regional conflicts escalating and the threat of nuclear war rising, humanity is at a critical moment,” said Dr. Richard L. Wood, president of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC. “Our forum will be a platform for in-depth discussion and debate that will explore our current global realities and seek tangible solutions to the rising threat of nuclear conflict.”

“It’s important that we host this discussion near the birthplace of nuclear weapons and with leading experts from differing perspectives regarding nuclear strategy,” Dr. Wood added.

Along with the Los Alamos and Sandia nuclear weapons laboratories, the region is home to the Trinity Site, where the first atomic bomb was detonated on July 16, 1945, and the Kirtland Underground Munitions Maintenance and Storage Complex, the largest storage site of nuclear warheads in the U.S. arsenal.

Among the forum's participants will be: Rose Gottemoeller, former deputy secretary general of NATO and former U.S. undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security; Thomas Countryman and Christopher Ford, both former U.S. assistant secretaries of state for International Security and Nonproliferation (Obama & Trump administrations respectively); Thomas "Thom" Mason, director of Los Alamos National Laboratory; Cardinal Robert McElroy, Bishop of San Diego; Most Rev. Joseph Mitsuaki Takami, Archbishop Emeritus of Nagasaki; Maryann Cusimano Love, associate professor of International Relations, The Catholic University of America; Richard Love, professor of National Security Strategy, the National Defense University; Gerard Powers, director of Catholic Peacebuilding Studies at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies; and thought leaders representing local residents and Indigenous communities impacted by nuclear weapons testing.

Participants will explore how strategic and ethical thinking regarding nuclear weapons needs to be reconsidered today in light of the geo-political rivalries between the U.S., a rising China, revanchist Russia, and smaller national actors. Those rivalries could all too quickly degenerate into nuclear war — a scenario made more urgent by the rise of cyberwarfare, hypersonic weapons, and the new potential for AI-generated cyberweapons to take control of the nuclear strike capacities of competing nations.

These risks have led multiple nations — including the U.S. — to expand their nuclear war-fighting capacity. This deterrence approach dominates modern strategic policies on nuclear arms. Meanwhile, some nuclear strategists through the last four decades — in part prompted by [*The Challenge of Peace*](#), the pastoral letter published in 1983 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops — have argued that the only rational and ethical response to these realities is multilateral and verifiable nuclear arms control and disarmament.

The forum will be preceded by closed-door dialogue between the participants, in which they will challenge one another's thinking and explore potential common ground. The public forum will include a report-out from the closed-door sessions, in which participants will summarize their own thinking and whether it might evolve in light of the dialogue; presentations from local community members; a chance for public reactions and dialogue with speakers; and a welcome reception featuring remarks from Archbishop Wester, along with a reflection by Archbishop Emeritus Takami, an in utero atomic bomb survivor who lost several members of his extended family in the August 9, 1945 atomic bombing on the city.

Journalists interested in attending should contact IACS Communications Director Doug Morino at dmorino@usc.edu

The forum will be livestreamed on the IACS YouTube channel at [YouTube.com/@iacsus](https://www.youtube.com/@iacsus).

Advance registration is required for both in-person and streaming options. To register, visit dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/nuclearevent/

For more information and a full list of participants, please visit dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/nuclearproject/



About the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC:

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