

**“Advancing integral disarmament  
in times of pandemic”**

23 MARCH 2021

**Intervention by His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin,  
Secretary of State**

Your Eminences, dear friends,

I wish to thank the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for organizing this interesting webinar.

If we take a quick look at its title, “Advancing integral disarmament in times of pandemic”, a series of questions emerge, the first of which could be: what connections can we see between integral disarmament and the Covid-19 pandemic?

One clear connection can be seen by taking into consideration the concept of “integral security”, which raises a further question, namely: what kind of security do we want and what are the most effective means of ensuring that security.

The pursuit of peace and security is at the heart of human desire and mutual coexistence, and the pandemic, which has unexpectedly erupted, has exposed our false securities and made us realize that no one is saved alone.<sup>1</sup> During his recent journey in Iraq, Pope Francis clearly underlined that «the temptation to withdraw from others is never-ending [...]. Amid the tempests we

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. POPE FRANCIS, *Fratelli tutti*, nn. 7 and 54.

are currently experiencing, such isolation will not save us. Nor will an arms race or the erection of walls that will only make us all the more distant and aggressive. Nor the idolatry of money, for it closes us in on ourselves and creates chasms of inequality that engulf humanity. Nor can we be saved by consumerism, which numbs the mind and deadens the heart [...] It is up to us, today's humanity, especially those of us, believers of all religions, to turn instruments of hatred into instruments of peace. It is up to us to appeal firmly to the leaders of nations to make the increasing proliferation of arms give way to the distribution of food for all».<sup>2</sup>

In these words of His Holiness, pronounced on the Plain of Ur, a place rich in symbolism, we can find a clear answer to our question “what links can we see between integral disarmament and the Covid-19 pandemic?” It is a response that also encourages us to reconsider our concept of security. As the Holy See has repeatedly emphasized, including in the Conciliar document *Gaudium st spes*, a correct concept of security calls into question elements not only of a political-military nature, but also of an ethical-moral, juridical and socio-economic nature.<sup>3</sup> This is what we can rightly describe as integral security.

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<sup>2</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the Interreligious Meeting*, Plain of Ur, 6 March 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. *Gaudium er spe*, n. 78: «Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice. [...] Peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly. [...] the achievement of peace requires a constant mastering of passions and the vigilance of lawful authority. But this is not enough. This peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well-being is safeguarded and men freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talents. A firm determination to respect other men and peoples and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood are absolutely necessary for the establishment

By letting ourselves be inspired by the words of Pope Francis, spoken on the Plain of Ur, we see that promoting integral security means to go beyond the all too common practices of the arms race, of idolatry of money and of consumerism in order to guarantee peace and security. It means transforming instruments of hatred into instruments of peace. It means rejecting the increasing proliferation of arms and accepting the promotion of the common good and the alleviation of poverty.

The pandemic has taught us how crucial it is to recognize the strong interconnectedness that exists between all of us. It prompts us to question how much the huge military expenditures are really able to guarantee the security of individual populations, of how much these resources could and should be allocated to investments to other ends (such as health, social equity, poverty eradication ...) that are more suited to achieving the objective of security.

We are facing multiple humanitarian crises in different areas of the planet: a health crisis, a food crisis, an environmental crisis, an economic and social crisis; these are strongly interrelated. In order to address them effectively, we can no longer act in isolation. We need to act responsibly with a common endeavor based on the awareness that only if we act together can we achieve new solutions that can solve the challenges we have to overcome, which are all deeply interlinked to one another.

Acting together means building mutual respect, dialogue, trust and confidence. This is the key for strengthening peace and

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of peace. Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice

security, especially in our ever-increasingly globalized world. Even if, as pointed out by Benedict XVI, as “a society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers”.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned by Cardinal Turkson, one year ago the Secretary General of the United Nations launched an appeal for an “immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world”, mentioning that the Covid-19 crisis does not recognize borders. Some days later, Pope Francis joined this appeal by saying, I am quoting: «May our joint fight against the pandemic bring everyone to recognize the great need to reinforce brotherly and sisterly bonds as members of a single human family. In particular, may it inspire a renewed commitment to overcome rivalries among the leaders of nations and the parties involved. Conflicts cannot be resolved through war! Antagonism and differences must be overcome through dialogue and a constructive search for peace». <sup>5</sup> End of quotation. International peace and security cannot be based on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, nor on maintaining a balance of power or regulating relations by replacing “the force of law” with “the law of force”. These are short-sighted approaches to national and international security problems.

Our reconsidered concept of security should be based on this awareness, on looking forward to a coherent approach to security in light of the modern day threats. The best way to respect the legitimate right to self-defense is to consider “self-defense” as a

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can provide».

<sup>4</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, n. 19.

depending variable of “collective-defense”, where collective security become “common security” and therefore “integral security”. This means also anchoring security to solidarity, justice, integral human development, the respect for fundamental human rights, and the care for creation.

This transformation process is based on the transition from competition to cooperation, founded on the priority of protecting personal dignity and promoting human life, through dialogue, multilateralism, mutual trust, and confidence-building measures.

The whole process of integral disarmament can make an important contribution to this process of transformation. This includes eliminating weapons of mass destruction by outlawing them, eradicating the illicit traffic of small arms and light weapons, banning ordnances that have grave humanitarian impacts like anti-personnel mines or cluster bombs, as well as remaining attentive to the new instruments of warfare that utilize the rapidly developing technologies involved in fields as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. It is easy to see how these efforts must be based on multilateralism and mutual trust and also be addressed together in the challenging process of strengthening an approach to integral security.

However, even if these efforts are needed to strengthening integral security, they are not in themselves sufficient. We need to commit ourselves to the complex yet indispensable process of peace and disarmament education. As mentioned by Saint John XXIII, integral disarmament means also reaching men’s very souls.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *After the Angelus*, 29 March 2020.

<sup>6</sup> St. John XIII, *Pacem in terris*, n. 113.

This seems to be the biggest challenge: we must not spare any efforts to promote of the culture of life, of peace, of care. Again, the pandemic is showing us how dangerous is the path that leads to national or individual selfishness.

As often mentioned by Pope Francis, we can never come out of a crisis like the pandemic and be as we were before, we come out either better or worse. The pandemic offers us a precious opportunity that we should not waste. It is an occasion to strengthen our approach to integral security and I hope that your work during this webinar may help to understand better how to support this approach.

Thank you.