

Statement from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Catholic Bishops Call on UK Government to Set the Example by Decommissioning Nuclear Weapons

The very existence of nuclear weapons has always posed grave moral questions. Their uniquely destructive power means that they belong in a different category from any other weapons; this has always been recognised in the particular attention with which they have been regarded by the Holy See and by our own Bishops' Conference. In his World Day of Peace message for 2006, Pope Benedict XVI, in pressing for progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament, argues powerfully that the retention of nuclear weapons does not enhance the security of their possessors or the peace of the world.

The United Kingdom is now at a moral and strategic crossroads. Its present nuclear-weapon capability is not expected to be sustainable beyond the early 2020s without major new investment in renewal or replacement. Initial decisions about its continuance need to be taken within the lifetime of the present Parliament, which could extend to 2010.

The Church has always been clear in its teaching about the vital necessity for eventual total nuclear disarmament. Our judgement is that, by decommissioning its nuclear weapons, the UK now has a unique opportunity to offer the international community an approach to security and legitimate self-defence without the unconscionable threat of nuclear destruction. At the same time it could give a new impetus to the wider process towards total nuclear disarmament.

We recognise the Government's grave responsibilities in these matters of security, both for our countries and the wider world. We urge the government to take a long-term view and act with courageous leadership by seeking to make this breakthrough towards total nuclear disarmament.

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