

# Alberta diplomat praises bishops' call for nuclear weapons ban

Canada's Catholic bishops are demanding that whoever forms the next government signs the nuclear weapons ban treaty and push NATO to denuclearize its military strategy.

Edmonton-based diplomat [Doug Roche](#), a former ambassador for disarmament, called the bishops' Sept. 26 statement "of historic significance."



**Doug Roche**

"To my knowledge (Canada's bishops) are the first national hierarchy in the world to give such full-throated endorsement and support to Pope Francis' firm condemnation of nuclear weapons," said Roche, who has advised the Holy See on nuclear disarmament in the past.

"There is no light between the Catholic bishops (in Canada) and Pope Francis on the question of the firm condemnation of nuclear weapons. This is a major development."

In their [Statement on Nuclear Weapons](#) Canada's bishops unanimously "make a special appeal to the Government of Canada to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons."

The 2017 treaty has so far been signed by 79 nations and ratified by 32, but none of the signatories are nuclear weapons states. The Holy See was among the first states to both sign and ratify the treaty. The treaty, which makes the

development and possession of nuclear weapons illegal under international law, comes into force as soon as 50 United Nations member states have ratified it.

“We also call on Canada, through changes in its own policies and practices, to persist in its efforts to bring NATO into conformity with the treaty,” said the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in their statement.

Global Affairs Canada defended its record on nuclear disarmament, but would not answer questions about the nuclear weapons ban treaty.

“Canada has made significant contributions to nuclear disarmament verification and the international monitoring system of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization,” said a Global Affairs spokesperson.

She also pointed to Canada’s role in promoting negotiations on a treaty to track and trace the trade in fissile materials necessary for nuclear weapons manufacture.

“All of our work in this area is part of our pragmatic, inclusive approach to disarmament,” she said.

Progress under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is smoke and mirrors, they say.

“Reductions in nuclear weapons from the high levels seen during the Cold War merely mask the modernization process in which today’s nuclear weapons contain far more explosive power than the atomic bombs which destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” the bishops said.

Roche prefers the Canadian bishops and Pope Francis to the NATO status quo.

“I believe that this statement by the Canadian bishops re-establishes the Canadian Catholic bishops’ conference as a leading national hierarchy in the advancement of the social justice issues of the Church,” Roche said.

In just 12 paragraphs that frequently quote papal and Vatican II teaching on nuclear arms, beginning with Pope John XXIII’s 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, the CCCB expresses frustration with Canada’s policy of deferring to NATO on nuclear deterrence.

“With so many informed analysts warning against the extreme dangers posed to the world by the new nuclear arms race, and the vigorous condemnation by Pope Francis of nuclear weapons, the time is not only ripe but pressing for action,” the statement read.

Early in his papacy, Pope Francis made it clear that whatever limited approval the Vatican and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops had given at the height of the Cold War for the strategy of nuclear deterrence, such moral approval no longer applied.

“Nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful co-existence among peoples and states,” Pope Francis said in December 2014. “The youth of today and tomorrow deserve far more.

“They deserve a peaceful world order based on the unity of the human family, grounded in respect, co-operation, solidarity and compassion. Now is the time to counter the logic of fear with the ethic of responsibility, and so foster a climate of trust and sincere dialogue.”

Canada’s bishops also reject any ethical argument in favour of nuclear deterrence or modernizing nuclear arsenals.

“The gravity of the nuclear weapons threat and the urgency of the abolition enterprise do not allow for timidity,” said Project Ploughshares executive director Cesar Jaramillo. “The CCCB should be applauded for articulating a clear call to the Government of Canada.”