

Nuclear showdown concerns expert



Doug Roche is a former chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Committee, MP, senator, and visiting professor at the University of Alberta. In 1995, he received the Papal Medal for his service on disarmament and international security.

Douglas Roche is an Edmonton author, professor and diplomat who has specialized in peace and security issues for more than 40 years. A former member of Parliament and senator, Roche was Canadian ambassador for disarmament at the United Nations.

Roche was awarded the Papal Medal in 1995 for his service as a special adviser. He has also authored more than 20 books and continues to speak out on nuclear disarmament, peace and security issues.

Grandin Media asked Roche to comment on the rising tension between the United States and North Korea over the Asian regime's nuclear ambitions, the possibility of a nuclear showdown, the role of the United Nations, and on how his Catholic faith continues to sustain him:

The Pope has called for nuclear disarmament. You yourself have talked about the value of the United Nations. The UN hasn't prevented famine, war and genocide. What is the greatest threat to peace in our time?

Well, there are two overarching problems in the world today that have to be resolved, global warming and nuclear weapons. On nuclear weapons, Pope Francis at a conference, which I attended in the Vatican in November of 2017, came out with a historic statement in which he categorically rejected nuclear weapons and said that their very possession is to be firmly condemned.

This is a very important step, and has aided the United Nations in moving

forward on its new treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. The Holy See was among the first to sign the treaty and to ratify it.

Canada has not signed this treaty?

Canada has rejected so far any consideration of signing the treaty because the United States is opposed to it. All of the major states that have nuclear weapons – United States, Russia, Britain, France and China – have opposed this new treaty on the grounds that it stigmatizes the possession of nuclear weapons, and that is of course exactly what it does.

Is the UN still relevant in the age of U.S. President Donald Trump and nationalism around the world?

You have got to consider Mr. Trump as a phenomenon, which he is, but in passing. I mean he's not going to be there forever. I take a much larger view of the world, not just American-oriented or Trump-centred.

There's clearly been a reaction against the development of what you might call the new international liberal order coming out of World War II. There's been such egregious disparities in the world. We've got a world in which the eight richest men in the world hold as much wealth as the bottom half of humanity. That is wrong!

That being said, two billion people have been lifted out of poverty in the past 20 years as a result of the programs of the United Nations. For me, these are social justice issues and we ought to look at the world around us through the eyes of social justice. And this is where I think we can find some really great inspiration in the social teaching of the Church.

Canada made headlines last year after controversially allowing arms sales to Saudi Arabia for the war in Yemen. How does this affect our current role as peacemakers?

It's certainly not helping. The United Nations adopted a few years ago the arms trade treaty, which is supposed to put better control systems on. And I believe Canada has been lax in following this new treaty, thus it's got itself into this controversy about the arms and Saudi Arabia.

It's (former prime minister) Lester B. Pearson who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for his role in getting United Nations peacekeeping started in the Suez Canal crisis at the time. Canada has a pretty good, longstanding track record.

“In the past 10 years or so, Canada has slipped. Canada withdrew from

full participation in United Nations programs and took a more inward look. Now this is contrary to a lot of values of Canadians.”

North and South Korea are locked in a war of words between President Trump and Leader Kim. What's your assessment of the situation?

I believe that's there only one solution, to what's called the North Korea problem, and that is negotiations.

Now do not misunderstand me, the acquisition of nuclear weapons by North Korea is a big problem. But a much bigger problem is the holding of nuclear weapons by all those states who currently possess them. What right do they have to maintain their nuclear weapons while proscribing their acquisition by any other country? While we are trying to resolve the North Korea crisis on the one hand, we ought to be looking at a much broader perspective on the other.

What's your assessment of both leaders?

Obviously the question of stability of political leadership is uppermost. I worry about the questions of leadership. If you use the word immaturity it's not a strong enough word to describe the conduct of these leaders involved. But leaders are not yet stepping up to the plate on behalf of human security.

Otherwise we would have far more money provided for United Nations programs and other programs, not just the United Nations, that are building the conditions for peace and less into military armaments.



Pope Francis holds a photo from the aftermath of the 1945 atomic bombing

of Nagasaki, aboard his flight to Chile. "I thought about making copies of it because an image like this says more than a thousand words," the pope told the journalists who are traveling with him. CNS photo/Paul Haring

What role does the Church have between these two leaders?

The role of the Church in providing backchannel diplomacy, the way in which Mikhail Gorbachev (the former leader of the Soviet Union) was received at the Vatican long before the end of the Cold War, the way in which popes have led in social and economic issues and in the building of peace has been at times instrumental.

What are the dangers and risks of this sabre rattling?

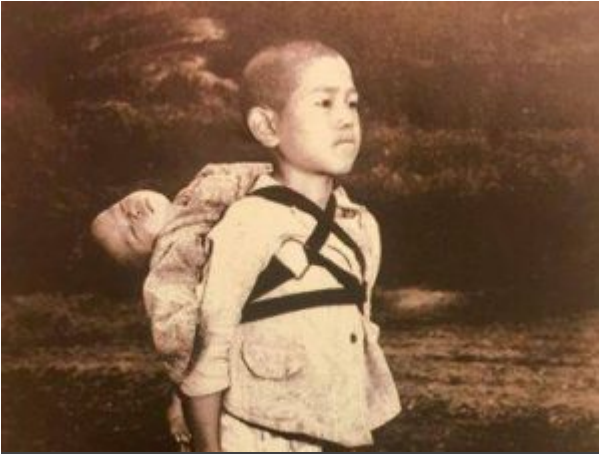
Miscalculation, misunderstanding, accidental escalation up to a point of no return. The very existence of nuclear weapons itself poses a threat to humanity. We ought not to be living in God's world on the edge of Armageddon.

I've been all over the world in my career. I've been all through Asia, Africa, Latin America. What do I see? I see people who want the same things. What do they want? They want simply enough to exist. Food for their families, education, health. People don't want to go around clobbering one another.

You wrote a book called *Peacemakers*, in which you talked to world leaders about a world free of war. Is this realistic?

Well, if a world free of war is not realistic, then could you kindly remove me from this planet? I mean, I don't want to live here. We've had societies and time periods when the world was relatively free of war, and we're moving into a society now where a culture of peace, a delineation of a culture of peace namely by its bedrock of non-violence. We're moving in that direction now.

Today we have wars, and I lament every single death in every war today, but the numbers are nowhere near what we had before, nowhere near. Five-sixths of the world is living at peace. Let's try to put it all in perspective, for reasons for hope that we can build on what we have already achieved.



A boy carries his dead brother on his shoulders while he waits at a cemetery in Nagasaki in an image taken by US Marine Joe O'Donnell in 1945. The photo was issued by the Vatican Press Office for circulation. Vatican Press Office

Do you think the culture of peace is a value of Canadian society?

Yes, I do. I think that Canadians have learned particularly through the Afghanistan war experience, which was a failure. In 2003, on the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people around the world and certainly in Canada marched on the streets in protest against this impending war.

What contribution are you most proud of, something that you worked on that you are particularly glad you had the chance to participate in?

Well, God has opened a lot of doors for me [including] an opportunity to work at the United Nations. I've been able to write about these issues, a lot of books on it. But I do this out of a sense of some responsibility. God has blessed my life with health, to begin with, and the circumstances of my life to play a role of some influence in the development of policies. That's enough.

I'm 88 now...I have no desire to retire, in the sense of just sitting down and doing nothing. I still want to write and lecture, and I feel that God will tell me when it's time to stop. Until then, I feel a need to participate as one person existing on this planet. Here on Earth, we have a responsibility to continue God's wonderful plan for the development of this sacred planet.