

Joint declaration of the President of the German Commission for Justice and Peace, Bishop Dr Heiner Wilmer, and the Representative for Peace Issues of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Renke Brahms, on the occasion of Hiroshima Day 2020

On August 6, 75 years ago, the dropping of a bomb changed an entire era. The use of the atomic bomb(s) had fatal consequences for the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But nuclear warfare and deterrence are no ghosts of history. There are still 16,000 nuclear warheads in existence worldwide and they are increasingly gaining strategic importance again in present times. This worrying development cannot leave us Catholic and Protestant brothers and sisters unaffected.

Today we commemorate the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. On this day, our thoughts are with the countless civilian victims. They lost their lives in a hopeless war and suffered the nuclear inferno.

The look into the past is a reminder for the present and the future. We are currently experiencing a fatal deregulation of international nuclear weapons agreements and arms policy. Embedded in the global crisis of diplomacy, the danger of an escalation of nuclear violence is now within reach. This concern is fuelled by efforts to modernise existing nuclear weapon systems in order to maintain their operational capability or adapt them to changing threat scenarios. Even "new" threats - cyber war, terrorism, trade wars, etc. - fundamentally question the strategic importance of these weapon systems.

Both the Catholic and the Evangelical Churches were extremely critical of the development of nuclear weapons. Although the value of deterrence was certainly recognized in the past, their use as a weapon of mass destruction was and is ethically unjustifiable. In recent times, there has been a growing consensus in both Churches that both the deployment of nuclear weapons and the nuclear deterrence strategy are unwarranted as a means of enforcing political interests. So, at the Peace Memorial in Hiroshima, Pope Francis said on 24 November 2019: "With deep conviction I wish once more to declare that the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is today, more than ever, a crime not only against the dignity of human beings but against any possible future for our common home. The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral, [...]." And the peace memorandum of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) emphasized already in 2007 that "the threat of using nuclear weapons can no longer be regarded as a means of legitimate self-defence". The political goal must therefore remain a Global Zero: a world without nuclear weapons.

As the President of the German Commission for Justice and Peace and as the Representative for Peace Issues of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany we expressly endorse this justified position. In memory of the victims of August 6, 1945, we today jointly call upon the political leaders to take serious and goal-oriented steps towards a world free of nuclear weapons. This requires the (re-)commencement of trustful dialogues and the political will for change. A first and impressive sign should be the acceptance and ratification of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - also by Germany.