

**Sr Alessandra**

**Plenary Address**

**Catholic Peacebuilding Network Conference: “Catholic Peacebuilding in Times of Crisis: Hope for a Wounded World”**

### **Climate, Development, and Peace**

*As Pope Francis emphasized in *Laudato Si'*, “everything is connected.” The Church's long-standing work to connect integral human development, integral peace, and integral ecology is all the more urgent given the existential threat posed by climate change. This panel examines how the Church is responding to these complex dynamics.*

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished speakers and guests,

Dear friends,

I thank you for inviting me to speak with you today on some of the most pressing issues facing our world and our Church. It is undoubtedly a very complex time in which we find ourselves, whether it be politically, economically, ecologically, but also spiritually. I am confident, though, that the conversations you are having in these days will no doubt contribute to personal and communal renewal, to which we are all consistently called.

I do not have to tell you exactly all the ways in which our world suffers now. And indeed, as Pope Francis says, “everything is connected” and so our efforts to rebuild our world must also be as comprehensive as the damage we see. Yet it is so difficult these days. I wish to acknowledge the suffering caused by war in Ukraine, South Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia, Syria, Mozambique, and Afghanistan, and also by gun violence in the United States. It is truly the case that if some of the human family is unsafe or broken, the whole of the human family feels the pain and the threat.

You, Catholic peacebuilders, are masters of the practice of peace towards true security - this security which does not entail only the strength of the military, or the number of weapons, but in the flourishing of every person. As the Catholic concept of integral human development calls for, your work prioritizes the dignity of the person and the health of communities, societies, states, and the planet. Through your pursuit of *positive peace* through tackling systems of structural violence, you leave no one behind and you tackle problems at their root, despite the magnitude of the issues you face. The world has great need for your wisdom and tenacity in all that it faces right now, from the pandemic to wars to climate degeneration.

The Catholic Church, as you well know, has a strong tradition of working for peace, justice, and development in an integral fashion. As Pope Paul VI noted in *Populorum progressio*: “For

peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men” (65).

I'd like to touch on the concept of *integrality* and share how we as Catholics have a unique contribution to the world of peace and development. As we know, modern peace and security threats are increasingly more interconnected. Rising inequalities, unemployment, famine, lack of access to healthcare, nuclear threat, worsening violence and political division, and climate deterioration have cascading effects on the security landscape, and they demand a cross-cutting, coordinated response. Despite this urgency the world is increasingly politically divided, and priorities have not been changed, as shown through the world's military expenditure in 2021, which topped 2 trillion US dollars for the first time in history. The diffusion of increasingly destructive technologies is also worrying because new destructive technologies are available to an increasing number of governments.

The pandemic is an opportunity to revisit the concept of “human security,” or the paradigm which refocuses security from that of state and military power to that of the human person, its rights, dignity, and “freedom from fear and want.” This concept guided the work of development in the past, including around the setting of the Sustainable Development Goals, but then fell out of use partly because it was not yet well enough defined. Yet because of the pandemic, we see now more than ever how interconnected are the challenges we face, and more and more are calling for a more holistic approach in our response.

The Catholic Church and other faith-based actors are uniquely positioned to promote an integral approach given their presence in contexts across many levels of society, from local to global, and many sectors, including education, healthcare, governance, and more. Take for example, the Holy See's global advocacy through this integral lens in the nuclear disarmament field and the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which celebrates its first Meeting of States Parties right now in Vienna. The legal architecture of nuclear disarmament is like a mosaic, strengthened by various components of the international nuclear apparatus: the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zones, the IAEA Safeguard Agreements, and the bilateral agreements like the New Start. In supporting these various agreements, the Holy See has promoted an integral approach to international nuclear governance. There is also a need to create a single architecture in other areas as well There is yet a long way to

go, but this is the potential of the Church- to speak from both the peripheries and the center with one, integral, voice.

Another example of integral security at work is food justice. As we know, many different types of conflicts can lead to food insecurity or aggravate existing structural problems that food systems are unable to solve. With the goals of faster production and increased trade, heavy responsibilities fall to individual farmers for their livelihoods and their environment, which have strong repercussions in these countries whose economies and societies are strongly affected. Yet, this is not just a problem of sustainability of crops but also of the global market that has introduced distortions that have penalized the poorest countries. The world agricultural systems as it was structured in the last 20 years has in fact failed.

In the process of transforming food systems, it is vital to center the respect for the dignity of the human person, the primacy of the agricultural sector, and the centrality of small farmers and family farming, which would allow food systems to be strengthened as a potential tool for conflict resolution. Dealing effectively and responsibly with such conflicts means sparing no effort to promote dialogue, as well as to foster a "change of mentality," to an agriculture conducted in a humane and truly and morally sustainable manner. Here again, we need a new architecture of rules regarding agriculture on a global level.

The concepts of integral peace and security are securely grounded in the traditions of *integral human development* and *integral ecology*, developed by the Popes over the years. Just as integral ecology and human development center the human person and foster a "culture of care", integral peace is only achieved by centering human dignity and promoting cultures of care and encounter. And this must include addressing inequality, which has only worsened since the Covid-19 pandemic.

We must reject the all-too-common practices of favoring military solutions, of idolatry of money and of consumerism, of promoting arms in order to guarantee peace and security. By promoting ethical and moral reflection on these topics, both within individuals and also regarding the whole world, we can more closely achieve the peace that surpasses earthly understanding. As Pope Francis says in *Evangelii gaudium*: "in the end, a peace which is not the result of integral development will be doomed; it will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence" (219). Catholic peacebuilders have a special opportunity to speak not only prophetically – with moral weight, imagination, and creativity – but also extremely practically, being engaged in all

sectors of work. In truth, this is a message that all must hear but not all can say. Additionally, as mentioned by Saint John XXIII, integral peace means also reaching the souls of all. This seems to be the biggest challenge: we must not spare any efforts to promote a culture of life, of peace, of care and to prioritize the least among us and help to alleviate the burden of inequality. Again, the pandemic has shown us the danger of the path that leads to national or individual selfishness.

One way the Vatican is engaging in this is through the *Laudato si' Action Platform*. Through engagement with seven sectors of society, with seven goals, across seven years, the Platform seeks to launch actions in response to the calls in *Laudato si'* to engender ecological conversion. By listening, connecting, collaborating with, and empowering communities around the world, we hope to bring about locally owned transformation with a global spotlight. Thank you to all of you who have committed yourselves to a plan, and I invite everyone else to join us in this journey. The Dicastery remains committed to supporting your work in peace and development in whichever way is possible to us, and we rely on your support to identify how we might best bring about the Kingdom of God and the visions of our current Holy Father.

Finally, as opens *Pacem in terris*: “Peace on Earth—which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after—can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order.” I would like to close by touching upon this crucial point today, in encouragement and hopefully inspiration to you all: I am convinced that our work for peace and development transcends temporality. It is a constant endeavor towards divine peace, not as the world promises us but as Jesus freely gives us. In this time when many crises have exploded or are reaching inflection points, we who devote our lives to justice often suffer greatly. Yet our hope is our greatest tool, and the assurance that we are working for strategic, sustainable change is vital to animate everything we do.

Indeed, Pope Francis says in *Lumen fidei*: “Let us refuse to be robbed of hope, or to allow our hope to be dimmed by facile answers and solutions which block our progress, ‘fragmenting’ time and changing it into space. Time is always much greater than space. Space hardens processes, whereas time propels towards the future and encourages us to go forward in hope.” It is true that the interconnected nature of crises today make them more difficult to respond to. Yet the reverse is also true – your positive actions to build peace and justice have network effects you may never hear about. Have hope that the Lord, the master peacebuilder, is orchestrating all of these things

in

his

time.

Thank you very much, I am looking forward to our discussion.