

Why Jesus Weeps—and How to Choose Life

We who respect life are weary of war: the killing, maiming, and destruction of cities and societies, and the enormous sums spent on these brutalities instead of on the things that make for peace. We are appalled at proposals to cut needed government services to fund yet further increases in military spending. We urge the U.S. Catholic Church—its leaders, clergy, men and women religious, and laity—to tell their elected officials, “Enough!”

Just since September 11, 2001, the United States has engaged in **wars, drone strikes, and Special Operations strikes** in at least seven countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. During that time, al-Qaeda has grown from a few hundred members based largely in a single country to a much larger franchise with branches and affiliates in multiple countries; and other extremist groups like the Islamic State have sprung up and greatly expanded their numbers and operations. U.S. military operations have caused countless civilian casualties and displacements, breeding resentment and fueling violent extremism. In Yemen and Somalia, millions of children are starving or at risk of starvation. We must advocate for a **halt to violent interventions and the use of Just Peace practices** to prevent, mitigate, and end armed conflict, save lives, and promote justice.¹

In addition to engaging in direct military operations, the U.S. and other countries have been **arming militants in various proxy wars**—in Syria, Yemen, and Ukraine, among others—again, with devastating consequences for local populations. In fact, the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing “global war on terror” trace back to U.S. arming of the Afghan mujahedeen to fight the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. We need **negotiated arms embargoes** to curtail the violence on all sides and promote political solutions to the conflicts.

U.S. **support for repressive regimes around the world**, including arms sales, military training, and diplomatic cover, also fuels resentment and contradicts our democratic principles. In particular, U.S. support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine and of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East helps drive Islamic extremism. We must challenge our government to be consistent in its **support for human rights and self-determination for all people**.²

Disdain for domestic and international law has marked U.S. counterterrorism policy, including waging war without proper authorization from Congress and in violation of the U.N. Charter, conducting drone warfare in multiple countries in violation of international law, detaining suspects without due process and torturing many, supporting human rights abusers in other countries, and conducting massive warrantless surveillance. We must advocate for U.S. policies that show **respect for the rule of law, diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation**.

Bloated U.S. spending on “defense” and “homeland security” feeds a military-first approach to international problems and a militarization of domestic law enforcement. Moreover, it represents seriously warped priorities at a time when Americans are told we cannot afford universal health care, adequate safety net programs, affordable housing, jobs with living wages, college education for all who want it, infrastructure repairs and improvements, or clean energy.

Military spending must be drastically cut, not increased, and the savings used for **increased spending on peacebuilding, human needs at home, and humanitarian and development assistance abroad.**

The world is bristling with some 15,000 nuclear weapons, and plans to “modernize” them run to the trillions of dollars.³ This is madness. On July 7, 2017, 122 countries voted at the U.N. for a treaty calling for the **abolition of all nuclear weapons.** The nuclear-armed nations boycotted the conference, but a vital new international norm has been established. The Holy See agrees.⁴

Official policies and public attitudes **scapegoating immigrants and refugees**—particularly Muslims—as threats to security and the economy lend credence to extremist narratives of a “clash of civilizations” and inevitable war between Islam and the West. While the wars the U.S. has fought or supported create millions of refugees, our government wants to close our borders and refuse them entry. **Welcoming immigrants and refugees** is our historic distinction, and a matter of justice, not merely charity.

At the root of failed U.S. policies are **systems of domination over peoples and the earth.** With about 5 percent of the world’s population, Americans consume close to 25 percent of the world’s energy and disproportionate amounts of other resources.⁵ U.S. foreign, military, and economic policy is designed to protect that global imbalance. To promote peace, we need to work tirelessly for **economic, racial, and environmental justice,** both domestically and internationally. If not us, then who? And if not now, then when?

¹ Just peace practices include economic development, capacity building, participatory processes, human rights advocacy, diplomacy, unarmed peacekeeping, nonviolent resistance, and restorative justice. The April 2016 Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference held in Rome and co-sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Pax Christi International, and others produced [“An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence.”](#) Pope Francis’ 2017 World day of Peace Message, [“Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,”](#) reinforces its conclusions. He asserts that “to be true followers of Jesus today ... includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.” He calls nonviolence “more powerful than violence” in righting wrongs, and offers concrete examples.

² “The whole of the Church’s social doctrine ... develops from the principle that affirms the inviolable dignity of the human person.” [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#) (2004), ¶ 107. All human rights derive from this principle, including the right to life from conception to natural death. The Compendium (¶ 157) calls human rights, including the right to self-determination, the basis of international law and the foundation of peace. Article I of the [U.N. Charter](#) cites protecting the right to self-determination in its second purpose, immediately after promoting peace and security.

³ The U.S. alone is planning to spend over \$1 trillion to upgrade its warheads and replace the missiles, submarines, and bombers that carry them. James Glanz and David E. Sanger, [“Trump, Who Pledged to Overhaul Nuclear Arsenal, Now Faces Increased Costs,”](#) *New York Times* (June 4, 2017). The other nuclear-armed countries have programs to modernize their arsenals as well. [“Modernizing Nuclear Arsenals: Whether and How,”](#) *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Jan. 7, 2015).

⁴ The Holy See voted for the treaty and has called the elimination of nuclear weapons “a moral and humanitarian imperative.” [“Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading Towards Their Total Elimination,”](#) March 23, 2017.

⁵ [“Use It and Lose It: The Outsize Effect of U.S. Consumption on the Environment,”](#) *Scientific American* (Sept. 14, 2012).