

SOMBRE ANNIVERSARY CALLS FOR BETTER CHOICES

This year marks the sombre 75th anniversary of atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan on Aug. 6 and 9, 1945. Throughout the nuclear era, Canada has participated heavily in the global nuclear cycle, in part by selling radioactive uranium internationally. Both nuclear-generated electricity and nuclear weapons rely on uranium as fuel.

The Catholic Church condemns possession and use of nuclear weapons. While Canada does not possess such weapons, it still has not signed the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. As a NATO member, Canada claims it needs the protection of the huge nuclear arsenal of the United States.

Pope Francis, however, has condemned the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. This refers to building and possessing nuclear weapons to deter other states from using theirs. Addressing a Vatican conference on nuclear disarmament in November 2017, the pope said both the threat of the use of nuclear weapons, “as well as their very possession, are to be firmly condemned” (*National Catholic Reporter*, Nov. 10/17).

Japan’s Catholic bishops have gone further to call for an end to nuclear power. In 2011, their country was ravaged by an earthquake which triggered a tsunami and nuclear power plant meltdown in Fukushima. Japanese people and their environment have known extreme suffering and destruction from two atomic bombs and a major nuclear accident.

Pope Francis publicly highlighted the Japanese bishops’ call to ban nuclear energy during his visit to Japan in November 2019. According to Reuters news agency, after his visit he also told reporters, “In my personal opinion, I would not use nuclear energy until there is total security. There is not enough security to guarantee that there will not be a disaster.”

Now New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan are using public funds to help finance a costly new generation of nuclear reactors which will take at least 10 years to build and operate. The nuclear industry promises carbon-free electricity generation to address climate change from these so-called small modular nuclear reactors. The Canadian federal government is also enthusiastically in favour of such nuclear expansion.

However, proponents of nuclear-free renewable energy emphasize the urgent need for climate action now – not 10 or more years from now when the new reactors might be ready. They call for increased energy efficiency and investment in energy sources such as wind, solar, geothermal and small hydro.

Highlighting advantages to human health and the environment from renewables, they also note that jobs and other economic benefits will flow to rural as well as urban communities from renewable energy. They point out that no safe solution has been found for permanent storage of nuclear waste, which remains dangerously radioactive for countless generations.

Two nuclear technology companies from the United Kingdom and U.S. have established offices in Saint John, N.B. They each received millions of dollars in public funds to develop prototypes of next generation nuclear reactors which may be mass produced and sold worldwide.

Canada would be an initial testing ground for this unproven and unnecessary technology. Instead, investment in renewables is a far better choice to create jobs, while safely and efficiently meeting present and future energy needs.

Remembering bitter lessons of history, Canada needs to show courageous leadership by signing the vital UN treaty to ban nuclear weapons. It also needs to avoid nuclear energy expansion for the sake of present and future generations of humanity and all creation.

Advocating in this way, people of faith can join other caring global citizens to promote peace and respect earth, our common home.

~ Roma De Robertis, SCIC

Based in Saint John, N.B., Roma participates with CRED-NB: Coalition for Responsible Energy Development in New Brunswick (<https://crednb.ca>).