

POPE FRANCIS

Against War

Building a Culture of Peace

With an Afterword by Andrea Tornielli

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Introduction

War Is a Sacrilege. Let's Stop Feeding It!

A year ago, on my pilgrimage to tormented Iraq, I was able to see for myself the disaster caused by war, fratricidal violence, and terrorism; I saw the rubble of houses and the wounded hearts, but I also saw seeds of hope for rebirth. I would never have imagined then that a year later a conflict would break out in Europe.

From the beginning of my service as bishop of Rome, I have talked about the Third World War, saying that we are already living it, though still in pieces. Those pieces have become bigger and bigger, welding together. . . . So many wars are going on in the world right now, causing immense pain for innocent victims, especially children—wars that cause the flight of millions of people, forced to leave their land, their homes, their devastated cities, to save their own lives. These are the many forgotten wars that reappear from time to time before our disenchanted eyes. These wars often seemed “far away”—until now, suddenly,

when war has broken out so close to us. Ukraine was attacked and invaded. Many innocent civilians, women, children, and elderly people have been affected by the conflict, forced to live in shelters dug out of the earth to escape the bombs. Families have been divided as husbands, fathers, and grandparents remain in the fight, while wives, mothers, and grandmothers seek refuge after long journeys, hoping to cross the border to find shelter in other countries that receive them with open hearts.

As every day we face heartbreaking images and hear the cry of children and women, we can only scream, "Stop!" War is not the solution. War is madness, war is a monster, war is a cancer that feeds on itself, engulfing everything! What is more, war is a sacrilege that wreaks havoc on what is most precious on our earth: human life, the innocence of the little ones, the beauty of creation. Yes, war is a sacrilege! I cannot fail to recall the plea with which Saint John XXIII in 1962 asked the leaders of his time to halt an escalation that could have dragged the world into the abyss of nuclear conflict. I cannot forget the force with which Saint Paul VI, speaking in 1965 at the United Nations General Assembly, said, "Never again war! Never again war!" Nor can I forget the many appeals for peace made by Saint John Paul II, who in 1991 described war as "an adventure without return."

What we are witnessing is yet another barbarity and unfortunately we have a short memory. Yes, because if we had a memory, we would remember what our grandparents and our parents told us, and we would feel the need

for peace just as our lungs need oxygen. If we had memory, we would not spend tens and hundreds of billions of dollars for rearmament, equipping ourselves with increasingly sophisticated armaments, increasing the market and the trafficking of weapons that end up killing children, women, and old people: \$1.981 trillion per year, according to the calculations of an important research center in Stockholm. That marks a dramatic increase of 2.6 percent in military spending in the second year of the pandemic, when all our efforts should have been focused on global health and saving lives from the virus. If we had memory, we would know that war, before it reaches the front lines, must be stopped in the heart. Hate, before it is too late, must be eradicated from hearts. And in order to do so, there is a need for dialogue, negotiation, listening, diplomatic skills and creativity, and farsighted politics capable of building a new system of coexistence that is no longer based on the power of weapons, but on deterrence. Every war is not only a defeat of politics but also a shameful surrender to the forces of evil.

In November 2019, in Hiroshima, a symbolic city whose inhabitants, along with those of Nagasaki, were slaughtered during the Second World War by two nuclear bombs, I reaffirmed that the use of atomic energy for the purposes of war is, today more than ever, a crime, not only against man and his dignity, but against any possibility of a future in our common home. The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possession of atomic weapons is immoral.

Who could have imagined that less than three years later the specter of a nuclear war would loom over Europe? So, step by step, we are moving toward catastrophe. Piece by piece the world risks becoming the scene of a unique Third World War. We are moving toward it as if it were inevitable.

Instead, we must forcefully repeat: No, it is not inevitable! No, war is not inescapable! When we allow ourselves to be devoured by this monster represented by war, when we allow this monster to raise its head and guide our actions, we lose everything, we destroy God's creation, we commit sacrilege and prepare a future of death for our children and grandchildren.

Greed, intolerance, ambition for power, and violence are motives that push forward the decision for war, and these motives are often justified by a war ideology that forgets the immeasurable dignity of human life, of every human life, and the respect and care we owe them.

Faced with the images of death that come to us from Ukraine, it is difficult to hope. Yet there are seeds of hope. There are millions of people who do not aspire to war, who do not justify war, but are asking for peace. There are millions of young people who are asking us to do everything possible and seemingly impossible to stop the war, to stop all wars. It is in thinking first of all of them, of young people and children, that we must repeat together: Never again war! And together we must commit ourselves to building a world that is more peaceful because it is more just, where it is peace that triumphs and not the folly of

war; justice, and not the injustice of war; mutual forgiveness, and not the hatred that divides and makes us see the other, the person who is different from us, as an enemy.

Here I would like to quote an Italian pastor of souls, the venerable Don Tonino Bello, bishop of Molfetta-Ruvo-Giovinazzo-Terlizzi, in Puglia, a tireless prophet of peace, who loved to repeat: conflicts and all wars “find their root in the fading away of faces.” When we erase the face of the other, then the noise of weapons crackles. When we keep the other person, his or her face and pain, before our eyes, then we are not allowed to violently disfigure his or her dignity.

In my encyclical *Fratelli tutti* I proposed that the money spent on arms and other military expenditures be used to set up a World Fund to finally eliminate hunger and to foster the development of the poorest countries, so that their inhabitants would not resort to violent or deceptive solutions and would not be forced to leave their countries in search of a more dignified life.

I renew this proposal today, especially today. Because war must be stopped, all wars must be stopped, and they will only stop if we stop “feeding” them.

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Francisco