

Now especially, peace must not depend upon weapons:

Regarding the enforcement of the security laws

To our Brothers and Sisters in Christ and to All Who Hope for Peace,

On March 29, new national security laws went into effect. (Note 1). In order to fulfill the Japan Catholic Church's mission to work for peace, it is important that we examine these laws to see if they in fact follow the road to the peace that God desires. Toward that end, we ask that all those who hope for peace to once again read last year's statement marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, "Blessed are the Peacemakers – Now, especially, peace must not depend upon weapons."

The following notes may be of help in that rereading.

1. Past statements by Japan's bishops regarding the security laws

In response to the Abe cabinet's announcement on July 1, 2014, that it had decided to recognize a right to collective self-defense, the Standing Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan issued a statement on July 3. We declared that the cabinet decision was a major problem because by a decision of a single cabinet that was in conflict with the fundamental principles of the Constitution it changed nearly 70 years of postwar curbs on militarization and the use of force.

Furthermore, to mark last year's 70th anniversary of the end of the war, the bishops' conference issued the message, "Blessed are the Peacemakers – Now, especially, peace must not depend upon weapons." By approving the Designated Secrets Law and a right to collective self-defense, the government has undermined Article 9 of the Constitution and put us on a path that may lead to the use of military force overseas.

2. The mission of the Catholic Church for peace

When we bishops issued our message marking the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, some asked why bishops were making a political statement that seemed to violate the principle of the separation of religion and state. In this regard, the first paragraph of that message affirmed, "the Church cannot close itself up with merely 'religious' concerns. We have realized that the problems of humanity are our problems." The Catholic Church does not stand for any particular political position. However, as believers, bishops have a duty to speak out when the recent trends of Japanese politics endanger the future of human lives and dignity.

Furthermore, "separation of religion and the state" does not mean the separation of government and religion, but the separation of the government and religious organizations. Thus, specific religious groups may not enter into relationships with the state that involve the exercise of power, nor may they receive special consideration from the state. This is distinct from political activity. And so, based upon our consciences as believers, we have the right and duty to engage in political activities (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 75). So also, when necessary, church leaders have the duty and right when matters of faith and morals are concerned to declare the teachings of

the church as regards politics (Gaudium et Spes, 76; Code of Canon Law, Article 747, Paragraph 2). The security laws are a problem touching upon the lives and dignity of people, and therefore the church cannot remain silent. We must look upon it as a human problem, exercise judgement in light of the Gospel and then act.

The bishops of Japan are acutely aware of our mission to work for peace. This awareness is built upon deep remorse for the attitude of the Japanese Church before and during the war as well as the experience of the horror of nuclear weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

3. The Constitution of Japan and the renunciation of war

The Constitution of Japan sets out the government structure, basic human and social rights, administrative structures, international relations, the spirit of the law and the system of governance. It puts in place a national policy of pacifism. However, when we look at the current situation regarding the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution as well as moves toward collective self-defense and the passage of security laws, we in fact see reinterpretations that violate the original intent of the Constitution. (Note 2). In addition, we see that attempts to amend the Constitution have suddenly taken on a new vigor. In the face of these realities, we cannot avoid expressing our serious concern for the future.

In addition, the government is working towards amending the Constitution to establish new “emergency provisions.” These provisions include recognizing government authority to set temporary limitations upon individual freedom and rights in emergency situations such as disasters or war. (Note 3).

As a matter of course, the bishops of Japan respect and support the idea of the pacifist Constitution of Japan. For Christians, renouncing war comes as a direct call from the Gospel of Christ, and as religious people who respect life we are convinced that for the sake of the whole human race it is an ideal that must not be abandoned. The Catholic Church believes that peace is not simply the absence of war nor is it maintained by a balance of hostile forces. Rather, it is built upon the practice of love for other people and nations, respecting their dignity. (Gaudium et Spes, 78).

4. The “right of collective self-defense”

Can we claim that the implementation of a law allowing collective self-defense measures is compatible with the Catholic Church’s goal of peace? Such a move increases international tensions and hostility, inclining people to conflict. Under this law, even if Japan were not itself under attack, the nation could become embroiled in the conflicts of others. This differs from Japan’s right to protect itself in the event of an attack, allying the country in the conflicts of other nations in clear violation of Article 9 of the Constitution.

Thus would the great principle of the renunciation of war be overturned and Japan would become a “military nation,” inevitably exposing itself to dangers it has not faced before. In addition, this legislation is basically intended to keep peace through military deterrence. This will lead to an endless arms race with other countries, with increasing defense spending that

will affect our lives. We must consider whether or not protecting peace by limiting military force by military force is even possible.

Brothers and Sisters who desire peace, we are now standing at an epochal crossroads. We know from the experience of World War II the enormous suffering inflicted upon civilians by the mass destruction wrought by modern warfare. Japan was not only a victim of that indiscriminate slaughter, but was also a perpetrator against other countries in Asia. In particular, the suffering caused by nuclear weapons goes beyond words. Having experienced such misery and devastation whose origins were in war, we have come thus far determined to never again cause such horrors and have therefore supported the ideal of pacifism embodied in our Constitution. We have passed this experience from generation to generation, inscribing a desire for permanent peace and pacifism in our hearts.

Now that more than 70 years have passed since the war, we fear that empathy with that tragic experience is weakening as the war becomes merely something of an academic memory. Let us not repeat those mistakes, but rather, as people of this time and as Christians let us reflect seriously upon what it is we are called to do. With prayers rather than armed force, let us move toward peace built on mutual trust.

April 7, 2016

Standing Committee of the
Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan

NOTES

Note 1: Two laws are involved. The first amends laws governing cooperation by Japan's Self-Defense Forces with other nations' military in peacekeeping and security operations. The second puts in place the legal framework for such involvement.

Note 2: Though constitutional scholars, former high court justices, cabinet legislative bureau chiefs, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations and many private citizens have protested this fundamental shift in post-war security policy, the government passed it by a forced vote. A constitution exists to limit a government's abuse of power to the detriment of the rights of citizens. For a government at a particular time to unilaterally change long-standing interpretations of the constitution is a denial of the whole constitutional principle.

Note 3: Other countries have emergency security laws, but the new Japanese one contains no limitations on the government. The well-known historical experience of the German Weimar Republic demonstrates the danger of abuse such a law can enable. The Weimar Constitution provided for the president to rule by decree in the event of a national emergency. Hitler took

advantage of that during a period of social unrest to gain unrestricted legislative power. Such historic abuses where extraordinary measures have become standard make plain the necessity of determining who decides when an emergency exists and what provisions are allowed. We must beware of the danger of abuse that national emergency laws present.