

**Conference of European Churches
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Churches urge NATO to withdraw tactical nuclear weapons

Endorsing the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, international and national ecumenical organisations have sent a message to NATO

Four international and national ecumenical organisations, including the Conference of European Churches (CEC) have urged NATO to withdraw all remaining ca. 200 U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from Europe and to end their role in NATO strategies. This would be an important measure in endorsing the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. The letter was signed by the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and the Canadian Council of Churches. The councils refer to their “enduring commitment to nuclear disarmament.”

On two previous occasions, the four organisations have addressed NATO on this matter in a joint letter, in March 2009 on the eve of NATO’s 60th anniversary and in October 2009. The new letter was sent in anticipation of the review of NATO’s nuclear policy that will be undertaken in 2011 as part of NATO reviewing its overall defense and deterrence posture. Last November, at its summit in Lisbon, NATO adopted a new Strategic Concept but could not agree on the future of its nuclear policy. Especially the issue of the remaining tactical nuclear weapons, which are located in five non-nuclear European member states, proved to be divisive. Whereas some countries, led by Germany, want them out and consider them leftovers from the Cold War that have no role in today’s NATO policy, other countries insist that they be kept, especially France and some new member states from the former communist part of Europe. Final decisions must be made at a NATO summit in 2012, probably in Chicago.

In their letter, the four ecumenical organisations express their disappointment about the outcome of the Lisbon summit. While endorsing the goal of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, NATO also stated that it will remain a nuclear alliance as long as nuclear weapons exist. And no indication was given of whether NATO will change its existing nuclear policy and of how it plans to fulfill its re-affirmed commitment to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

However, the four organisations welcome the 2011 defense and deterrence review as “a new opportunity for change that is long overdue and widely anticipated.” They make a number of specific recommendations. One step for NATO to make would be to commit itself to the new U.S. policy stating that nuclear weapons will not be used against non-nuclear weapon states that are party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and are in compliance with their NPT obligations. The letter notes that the new Strategic Concept has omitted language in earlier Concepts about nuclear weapons preventing ‘any kind of war’, which included non-nuclear threats. Also in its overall security strategy, NATO should reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons.

As to the tactical nuclear weapons, NATO should end all ‘nuclear sharing’ tasks of non-nuclear member states, including the withdrawal of these weapons from Europe. The letter notes that the new document, while affirming the need for participation of Allies in peace time basing of nuclear forces, no longer states that these weapons must be based in Europe, as still was emphasized in previous Strategic Concepts. Ending ‘nuclear sharing’ would enhance the credibility of NATO’s non-proliferation policy, as it would address doubts about its members’

compliance with the NPT which prohibits any transfer of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear weapon states. Moreover, it would reduce the number of countries in the world with nuclear weapons on their soil from the current 14 to 9.

The letter expresses concern about Russia's much larger arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons and underlines the urgent need for transparency, relocation and reduction. However, the councils warn against a linkage between NATO decisions and Russian steps, as the issue should not be tied up in potentially lengthy and complex negotiations. The four organisations have sent a similar letter to U.S. President Obama and Russian President Medvedev.

[Full text of the letter](#)

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The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of 120 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 associated organisations. CEC was founded in 1959. It has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.

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