



Irma Argüello, [Infobae](#), 27 Mar 2014.

The meeting between **Pope Francis** and **President Obama** could foreshadow opportunities for peace and the struggle against poverty if words translate into positive actions.

Obama said on arriving in Rome that **he came to listen to a Pope who had arrived on the scene to help the poor and combat inequality**

Nevertheless, poverty and inequality are not abstract concepts: they stem from the decisions made by rulers, both locally and internationally. For example, the armed conflicts and the arms race are responsible for much of the poverty and inequality that exists globally. The case of nuclear arsenals, seen as the basis of international power, speaks for itself.

The United States spends around **2 million dollars per hour** to sustain its nuclear arms complex, which fortunately has little if any chance of being used. If you take into account the expenditures of all nuclear armed states, which also includes Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea, this figure adds up to a total of **11 million dollars per hour**

. What is brutal about this situation is that this almost unimaginable level of spending is diverted from investments, needed to satisfy the most basic human needs, in the countries with arms (some of which have tremendous social deficits) and from international aid, which developed nations fund to fight extreme poverty.

We must ponder, without any additional delay, about how many millions could be fed, and how many hospitals, how much education and how much infrastructure could be put in place if these sterile investments were made with more noble ends. The possession of nuclear arms is also a clear question of inequality, as it helps to concentrate international power in hands of very few,

and in this way, contaminates multilateral dialogue at the expense of respect and even-handed treatment of the interests of the non-nuclear weapon states.



All the same, the myth has feet of clay. The belief in nuclear dissuasion as a source of power, contrasts with the plausibility of an act of nuclear terrorism (which could not be dissuaded) that would have a devastating political and economic impact on both nuclear armed states, and non-nuclear weapons states, without distinction.

Not in vain President Obama arrived in Rome after having participated in the **Third Nuclear Security Summit**

in The Hague, which brought together 53 heads of states to debate measures to prevent nuclear terrorism. Unfortunately, little was discussed there about the risks of nuclear arms, or the humanitarian consequences of their existence and the pressing need for disarmament. Evidently, Obama cannot on his own solve all of these dilemmas in a nation in which portions of its leadership, on the one hand show sensitivity to social matters, but at the same time believe in armed solutions to conflicts and a national security based on nuclear arms.

In this first year of his papacy, **Pope Francis has positioned himself as a universal leader for peace, not only for Catholics but for everybody** . It's

enough to see

his role in key conflicts like the crisis in Syria

, where his positive influence opened the doors to a negotiated solution in a multilateral framework. His potential to do good, generating a change in the paradigm of international relations, is noteworthy, for his own conviction and style, and for being in the right place and time.

The time has come to tie together subjects on the international agenda that are frequently dealt with separately. Peace, poverty and inequality are all part and parcel of an international system of sustainable governance that has human beings in the forefront of its concerns. As such, today they are more than ever, mutually dependent.

Francis does not need to say all of these things. **It is enough that by way of open dialogue he inspires Obama** to a genuine reflection leading the president to make the right decisions in favor of global security, prioritizing humans in all cases, instead of power games between nations. Also, that his intention and example may inspire other leaders, beginning with those of nuclear weapon states and their allies, to bet on peace, on the multidimensional structures to support it and on a progressive nuclear disarmament.

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