Good morning, everyone.

It’s a great honor to be here with you today. My name is Naomi, and I work for Pax Christi Flanders, focusing on issues related to security and disarmament.

In recent years, there has been much discussion about European states and their ability to protect themselves from adversary states, particularly in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, President Putin has not hesitated to threaten the use of nuclear weapons whenever he deems it necessary. These threats target not only Ukraine but also any state that tries to stand between Russia and its goals, essentially the West.

If we follow the main argument in favor of nuclear weapons, which is the theory of nuclear deterrence, most European countries should have little to fear. Many European countries are part of the NATO alliance and presumably benefit from its extended nuclear deterrence. However, nuclear deterrence is far from guaranteed.

It is not as simple as NATO invoking Article 5 to use nuclear weapons when a threatened allied state feels it is necessary. If North Korea were to target NATO headquarters in Brussels tomorrow, the entire Nuclear Planning Group, which includes all NATO allies minus France, would have to agree to retaliate with nuclear means. The decision would then fall to the UK Prime Minister and the US President, as the vast majority of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe are US property, and their use is ultimately decided by the US.

Furthermore, NATO employs a flexible response strategy, meaning they can respond in any way they see fit for the situation, and a nuclear attack will not necessarily be met with a nuclear response. I am not advocating for MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction), but it is important to clarify the position of umbrella states in NATO. With the US elections approaching, some candidates have made it clear that Europe should become more self-reliant in matters of security.

Beyond the question of whether these weapons would be used in defense of Europe, I argue that they do the opposite. The presence of nuclear weapons does not make us safer; instead, it exposes us to greater risks. The idea that the threat of mutual destruction can prevent conflict is not only morally indefensible but also practically unsound. History has shown that the existence of nuclear weapons heightens tensions and increases the likelihood of catastrophic accidents or intentional use.

The belief that nuclear deterrence is a legitimate defense strategy is partially rooted in the fact that we avoided nuclear war during the Cold War. However, this cannot be proven. What we do have proof of is that, on more than one occasion, the world was spared due to the wise decisions of individuals like Vasily Arkhipov and Stanislav Petrov.

While the number of nuclear weapons has steadily decreased since the end of the Cold War, today we see that numbers are rising again, and more states are expressing their desire for their own nuclear deterrents. This brings us to today's topic: the debate around the Eurobomb. It is complex and multifaceted, but I firmly believe that the notion of nuclear deterrence is fundamentally flawed. To rely on it, and to imply that Europe needs its own nuclear weapons, is misguided and dangerous. In reality, nuclear deterrence provides a false sense of security and perpetuates a cycle of fear and mistrust.

We haven’t even discussed the general dangers, such as the numerous Broken Arrow incidents during the Cold War. Even if we ignore the fact that any European country creating its own nuclear arsenal would grossly violate international law, what is the point of investing in a “defense” strategy that everyone claims they don’t want to use?

For a “credible” nuclear deterrent, the threat should be credible. By repeatedly asserting that they have no intention of ever using these weapons to wash their hands of what these weapons could potentially cause, they actively undermine their own deterrence strategy. The whole argument is riddled with contradictions and shocking lapses in judgment that persist to this day.

Pursuing a European nuclear capability would contravene international agreements, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. This conversation also highlights the inequality in international security and the audacity of Western countries to scold Global South countries on security issues while openly discussing violating international treaties they have signed and ratified.

The development of a Eurobomb would provoke a new arms race, destabilizing the region and increasing the risk of nuclear conflict. It would divert resources away from essential areas such as healthcare, education, and sustainable development, further exacerbating social and economic inequalities. In a time when we face numerous global challenges, from climate change to pandemics, even entertaining the idea is morally bankrupt.

From a moral and ethical standpoint, the very notion of developing new nuclear weapons stands in stark opposition to the principles of peace and human dignity. The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any nuclear weapon use, whether intentional or accidental, are well-documented. The hibakusha, survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, have long testified to the unspeakable suffering caused by these weapons. Their stories serve as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for disarmament.

As I conclude, I want to emphasize that the journey toward disarmament is a collective one. It requires the concerted efforts of governments, civil society, and individuals alike. Each of us has a role to play, whether through advocacy, education, or simply by raising our voices in support of peace.

Our challenge, therefore, is to ensure that Europe remains a champion of these disarmament principles. Instead of pursuing new nuclear capabilities, we should be reinforcing our commitment to existing treaties and working towards their universalization and full implementation. This includes advocating for the ratification of the TPNW by all European countries and pushing for the removal of nuclear weapons stationed on European soil.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.