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NEWS

Three Catholic Cardinals Issue Rare Joint Statement on the Morality of U.S. Foreign Policy

Cardinals Cupich, McElroy and Tobin cite Pope Leo XIV's direction to diplomats

Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Newark, (Jan. 19, 2026) – Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Robert McElroy, archbishop of Washington and Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., archbishop of Newark today issued a strongly worded statement measuring U.S. foreign policy against the principles set forth by Pope Leo XIV in his Jan. 9, 2026 address to members of the diplomatic corps accredited the Holy See.

Commenting on the statement, Cardinal Cupich stated, "As pastors entrusted with the teaching of our people, we cannot stand by while decisions are made that condemn millions to lives trapped permanently at the edge of existence. Pope Leo has given us clear direction and we must apply his teachings to the conduct of our nation and its leaders."

Cardinal McElroy offered these thoughts: "Catholic social teaching testifies that when national interest narrowly conceived excludes the moral imperative of solidarity among nations and the dignity of the human person, it brings immense suffering to the world and a catastrophic assault on the just peace that benefits every nation and is the will of God." Further he noted, "In our current national debate about the fundamental contours of American foreign policy, we ignore this reality at the cost of our country's truest interests and the best traditions of this land that we love."

Cardinal Tobin remarked that, "Recent events, including participation in last week's consistory in Rome with Pope Leo and brother cardinals from across the world, convince me of the need to underscore the vision of Pope Leo for just and peaceful relations among nations. Otherwise, escalating threats and armed conflict risk destroying international relations and plunging the world into incalculable suffering."

Full text of statement:

Charting A Moral Vision of American Foreign Policy

In 2026, the United States has entered into the most profound and searing debate about the moral foundation for America's actions in the world since the end of the Cold War. The events in Venezuela, Ukraine and Greenland have raised basic questions about the use of military force and the meaning of peace. The sovereign rights of nations to self-determination appear all too fragile in a world of ever greater conflagrations. The balancing of national interest with the common good is being framed within starkly polarized terms. Our country's moral role in confronting evil around the world, sustaining the right to life and human dignity, and supporting religious liberty are all under examination. And the building of just and sustainable peace, so crucial to humanity's well-being now and in the future, is being reduced to partisan categories that encourage polarization and destructive policies.

For all of these reasons, the contribution of Pope Leo in outlining a truly moral foundation for international relations to the Vatican diplomatic corps this month has provided us an enduring ethical compass for establishing the pathway for American foreign policy in the coming years. He stated:

In our time, the weakness of multilateralism is a particular cause for concern at the international level. A diplomacy that promotes dialogue and seeks consensus among all parties is being replaced by a diplomacy based on force, by either individuals or groups of allies. War is back in vogue and a zeal for war is spreading. The principle established after the Second World War, which prohibited nations from using force to violate the borders of others, has been completely undermined. Peace is no longer sought

as a gift and desirable good in itself, or in pursuit of "the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God with a more perfect form of justice among men and women." Instead, peace is sought through weapons as a condition for asserting one's own dominion.

Pope Leo also reiterates Catholic teaching that "the protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation for every other human right" and that abortion and euthanasia are destructive of that right. He points to the need for international aid to safeguard the most central elements of human dignity, which are under assault because of the movement by wealthy nations to reduce or eliminate their contributions to humanitarian foreign assistance programs. Finally, the Holy Father points to the increasing violations of conscience and religious freedom in the name of an ideological or religious purity that crushes freedom itself.

As pastors and citizens, we embrace this vision for the establishment of a genuinely moral foreign policy for our nation. We seek to build a truly just and lasting peace, that peace which Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel. We renounce war as an instrument for narrow national interests and proclaim that military action must be seen only as a last resort in extreme situations, not a normal instrument of national policy. We seek a foreign policy that respects and advances the right to human life, religious liberty, and the enhancement of human dignity throughout the world, especially through economic assistance.

Our nation's debate on the moral foundation for American policy is beset by polarization, partisanship, and narrow economic and social interests. Pope Leo has given us the prism through which to raise it to a much higher level. We will preach, teach, and advocate in the coming months to make that higher level possible.

Signed,

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago
Cardinal Robert W. McElroy, Archbishop of Washington
Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., Archbishop of Newark

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About the Archdiocese of Chicago
The Archdiocese of Chicago, pastored by Cardinal Blase J. Cupich is the third largest in the United States. It serves approximately 2 million Catholics in 216 parishes in Cook and Lake counties and through many ministries and social service agencies. Its 150+ elementary and secondary schools comprise one of the largest U.S. private school systems. It is also the home of St. Mary of the Lake University/Mundelein Seminary. For more information visit www.archchicago.org.

About the Archdiocese of Washington
The Archdiocese of Washington is home to more than 600,000 Catholics living in Washington, DC, and five Maryland counties: Calvert, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's and St. Mary's. Led by Cardinal Robert W. McElroy, it includes 140 parishes, 90 schools, the St. John Paul II Seminary and many ministries. For information visit www.adw.org.

About the Archdiocese of Newark
The Archdiocese of Newark serves 1.3 million Catholics across northern New Jersey's Bergen, Essex, Hudson, and Union counties. Led by Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., the sixth archbishop of Newark, the Archdiocese includes 211 parishes, 67 Catholic schools, the Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology, St. Andrew's Hall College Seminary, Redemptoris Mater Seminary and numerous missions and ministries committed to faith, education, and social service. For more information, visit www.rcan.org.

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