

Nuclear bomb race not a faith showdown, says atomic official: Global poverty and extremists are key issues

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The head of the International Atomic Energy Association contends that although the nuclear weapons landscape is increasingly uncertain, it is not shaping up into a showdown along religious lines.

“I hear people talk about a Muslim bomb, a Jewish bomb, a Hindu bomb,” said Mohamed ElBaradei in remarks October 25 in New York. “This is absolutely crazy. It is a distorted view of faith.”

ElBaradei, the director general of the agency that monitors global use of atomic power under the auspices of the UN, said the number of nuclear states is likely to grow. Recent developments in North Korea and Iran are examples of countries seeking the status that comes with nuclear capability.

But the nuclear expert insisted that the new balance of nuclear power should not be thought of in terms of religious conflict. The standoff, for instance, between the nuclear nations of India and Pakistan has “nothing to do with religion.” He believes that the root of proliferation is a question of “power and resources.”

The most credible future dangers, according to ElBaradei, might be expected from “extremist” groups capable of building small-scale devices or detonating nonmilitary nuclear material. Since nuclear secrets are difficult to monitor, his agency’s current strategy is to monitor industrial production and pursue diplomacy.

Foremost for ElBaradei, however, is the global war on poverty. He said a lack of resources leads to the elevation of strong-arm leaders with nuclear aspirations—“an uncontrolled chain reaction” that “starts with poverty.”

ElBaradei has served as the head of the agency since 1997. In 2005 he and the IAEA were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts “to prevent nuclear energy from being used for military purposes.”

ElBaradei made his remarks after receiving an award from the Interfaith Center, an organization with ties to the UN that recognizes figures who collaborate to benefit all people of faith. Previous recipients of the award have included former president Bill Clinton, actor Richard Gere and retired South African archbishop Desmond Tutu. - *Religion News Service*