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Central/Eastern European Consultation

27 – 29 April 2011

Global Report

Introduction

Vukovar is a Croatian town that was destroyed by Serbian forces 20 years ago. In the recent past, pictures of hundreds of exhausted civilians evacuating a destroyed Vukovar shocked the world.

At present time, Vukovar has become a symbol for “remembering,” however this “remembering” is not simply retrospective and historic. The town remains divided, and its wounds from the war have yet to heal. However, Citizens and local governments have made efforts towards building inter-ethnic trust, inspiring hope for the future.

You can find the press release in English at Ref. [2011-0238-en-eu-IS](#), in Croatian at Ref. [2011-0238-ao-eu-IS](#), in French at Ref. [2011-0238-fr-eu-IS](#) and in Spanish at Ref. [2011-0238-sp-eu-IS](#).

The Central/Eastern European Regional Pax Christi Consultation took place from 27th to 29th April 2011 in Vukovar, Croatia. Marie Dennis, Co-President of Pax Christi International, started the Consultation with a speech that expressed that the event was an opportunity for a peace movement in Vukovar. Participants were welcomed by a local Franciscan priest who said that “20 years ago, weapons were doing the talking [in the region]”. He gave thanks to God for witnessing the burgeoning processes of people meeting and looking to one other again. He added that the city of Vukovar, however, has become known as a city of tolerance, but “to live in that [kind of] atmosphere is not enough. One should also commit himself to love one another”.

After all the Consultation participants introduced themselves, Marie Dennis explained the Strategic Framework of Pax Christi International 2011-2013 and its context to the event.

This global report gives the minutes of the 4 different sessions and some feedback on the Peace Award 2011:

1. Religion and Violent Extremism.
2. Eco-Justice: Ecological Challenges for Justice and Peace in the Region.
3. Developing Peace Spirituality and Peace Theology.
4. Towards Restorative Justice and Reconciliation.
5. Pax Christi International Peace Award Ceremony.

Religion and Violent Extremism

Date: 27th April 2011

Chair: Jan Peters SJ

Minutes: Mark Barwick

1. Violent Extremism and Alternatives for Peace

Mark Barwick of the International Secretariat began the session by outlining a theoretical framework for the topic.

“The term *extremism*, always used in a pejorative sense, is typically used for anything that lay far away from the perceived and accepted ideological centre of a society. It is nonetheless difficult to define and remains a somewhat ambiguous word.

Each of us constructs our reality over time, using the raw materials of various experiences and influences; whether they are family, societal, culture, religion, media, or our own individual experiences. We are each individually a composite of many such elements.

At the same time we are also deeply influenced by numerous social networks that define us and give texture to our lives. These networks are sources of common identities as well as purveyors of ideologies, grievances, and perceptions of injustices.

One powerful builder and transmitter of these constructed realities is religion, since religion itself is an ideology based on a constructed narrative. This seems to be especially true of what has been called the ‘revealed religions’, which are based on the conviction that God has revealed something unique to their particular faith community, (e.g. God revealed the law to Moses, Jesus of Nazareth is the incarnate Word of God, or the Prophet who received the Qur’an from the Messenger of Allah). Such conviction can lead to binary thinking, which strongly contrasts two mutually exclusive terms, e.g. good-evil, right-wrong, heaven-earth, God-Satan... organizing the world into a hierarchical structure. Terms and concepts are related to positives and negatives with no apparent leeway for deviation. Binary oppositions are frequently employed in biblical thought and ideology.

This has the effect of producing communal cohesion, either to reinforce the community or to repel a common enemy. This phenomenon has been clearly seen in the United States (U.S.)

especially over the past 10 years. “You’re either with or against us”, declared U.S. President George W. Bush.

Another reason why this topic has received attention in the field of peace building is due to a change in the character of violent conflicts in recent decades and increasingly in the 21st century. In the more recent past we have typically framed conflicts as those that occur between nations. However, nations, as Benedict Andersen said, are fundamentally ‘imagined communities’ in the sense that they are formed by people who cannot possibly know one another, although we imagine ourselves as a community with a common identity and a common historical narrative.

Since the 19th century nationalist loyalties in Europe have progressively begun to unravel, creating somewhat of an identity crisis at a collective level. If we are not a united people with a common identity and a common historical narrative, who are we then? This question has opened a space for other forces, other ideologies, including religion, to serve as a source of identity that would bind a population together in a single collective unit. More attention is now therefore being given to non-state actor violence that is being carried out not by nations but by individuals, corporations, terrorist groups, guerrilla movements and others. Acts of non-state actor violence are not new, but their importance has been elevated in the Western press. Religion has played heavily in the present discourse, in part because of two conflicting world views on the role of religion in society:

- ❖ ‘Religion should provide the foundation for society itself’ – evident in medieval Europe (‘Christendom’), imposition of sharia in some Islamic societies, vision of a divine destiny for Israel, America, etc.
- ❖ ‘Religion simply must be privatized’ – attempts to remove religion altogether from the public sphere, such as French laïcité, US-style separation of church and state, or tendencies of secular fundamentalist groups in many Western societies today.

In the end, it is the fear of the ‘Other’ that provokes fear, threatens insecurity, threatens the loss of identity, culture and power and brings into question cherished values.

We are now witnessing the emergence of transnational identities and as a result shared narratives of violence. Pax Christi International seeks to understand and deconstruct these

narratives while exploring narratives of peace. The latter contributes to the development of a spirituality of peace.”

2. Narratives of Violence and Peace in the Caucasus

“In the past, religion-based violence was relatively unknown in the Caucasus”, said *Abdullah Duduyev of Chechnya*, “However, with the implosion of the Soviet Union came a centralisation of violence and cycles of revenge orchestrated in Moscow”. After the first Chechnyan war, narratives that reinforced national identities changed, including the religious narratives that promoted communal cohesion. An authoritarian regime put more pressure on Muslims, as Islam plays an important role in Chechnyan society. Arbitrary violence was perpetrated against Muslims. Religion then became a force to unite the people against a hated regime. In the beginning, these were not extremists. The regime attempted to depict the opposition as violent extremists who were trying to topple the nation. These tactics have been used for other groups, as any rebellion is viewed as sedition.

Before the wars, Islam was primarily linked to cultural values. Then established religious leaders lost the support of the people. More extremist elements began to fill the gap, many coming from the Middle East and elsewhere. These appeared to have the answers, while the traditional religious leadership appeared to offer no guidance and lacked credibility.

Now extremist thinking eclipses the rest, suppressing Chechnyan cultural traditions and the vibrant spirituality that had been in place in favour of a rigid religious fundamentalism. Such cultural and religious suppression has produced considerable frustration among the population. Committees are now forming to promote reconciliation based on Islamic principles and to resolve many conflicts.”

3. Narratives of Violence and Peace in the Balkans

Amra Pandzo of Bosnia-Herzegovina began by saying “Peace is at the heart of Islam, as the name itself suggests”. She cited several passages in the Qur’an and other foundational teachings on peace. She also pointed out that Islam has always been a constituent part of European cultures.

“However, when Muslims in the region came under attack from Serbia, Islamists came from other parts of the world to defend them, bringing with them another view of Islam. They linked violence to their religion, declaring a ‘holy war’ and used violence against ‘non-believers’. Bosnian Muslims thought it was very strange to link God to violence and use ‘Allahu Akbar’ (*takbir*) like a war cry.

Tragically, people of all faiths manipulate religious symbols narratives to instil fear, discrimination, and division. For instance, the Serbian Orthodox Church has long interpreted their history in a way that accentuated their victimisation by others. Likewise, the Catholic Church’s focus on the Cross and the suffering of Christ has been used to promote more violence, instead of viewing itself as a partaker in the faith of Abraham. Curiously, each community carries a salutation of peace.

As highlighted earlier, the misuse of religion is sometimes linked to a story about being a chosen people. It is very easy to manipulate people with this message, expressing that their faith or ethnicity is unique and particularly blessed. This can be easily translated into the idea that one is ‘better than others’. We forget that such revelations are actually happy news for all people. Faith is a way to affirm the interconnectedness of all human beings. Faith, itself, is a path to love.

Thankfully, the more extremist elements in the region are becoming increasingly marginalised and moderate. A peaceful Christian narrative, more faithful to the teaching and example of Jesus, is emerging for both Orthodox and Catholics.”

Eco-Justice: Ecological Challenges for Justice and Peace in the Eastern European Central Region

Date: 28 April 2011

Chair: Wiltrud Rösch-Metzler, Member Executive Committee (Germany) and Jef Felix, Member Executive Committee (Belgium).

Minutes: Paul Lansu, International Secretariat (Brussels).

Resource Papers:

- 'Ecology, Justice and Peace', International Secretariat, September 2010: see document 2010-0573.
- 'Budapest Call for Climate Justice': <http://www.ecen.org/cms/uploads/11budapestfinalcall.pdf>
- 'The Budapest Ecumenical Youth Declaration', WCC, 12 November 2010. Read in Annex.
- Preparatory papers of resource persons. See contribution of Milan Scekić at 2011-0255 in Croatian; and of Michael Strieber at 2011-0216 in English.

Introduction: workshop purpose, possible outcomes, resources papers, programme, introduction of participants/resource persons.

Objectives of the session:

As a Catholic peace movement Pax Christi International has to reflect upon the challenges posed to peace building by the changes in the ecological system. What is the role we should take on? What can we do: [i] What should be the role of the churches and religions in this debate? [ii] What is specific from a Catholic perspective; [iii] What is specific for Pax Christi?

Specific goals for this Workshop were:

- Build on an ethics of eco-spirituality, in order to open-up new perspectives on 'Care for Creation';
- Define the role of the churches/religions and church/religion related organisations in order to work together in a more coordinated manner and strive towards the same goal: eco-justice;
- Share in an open atmosphere opinions on eco-justice and eco-spirituality;
- Raise awareness to the impact of the ecosystem on poverty and wealth.

This session had 4 steps to be taken:

1. To see and read the 'signs of the times' of this part of the European region;
2. To judge, analyse, and discuss the impact of this issue of our work;

3. What is the reference with our faith? Can eco-spirituality inspire us in our work?
4. What can we do or what need to be done? Action proposals. What comes next?

1. Reading ecological threats and challenges in the Central and Eastern European region

Resource persons of three sub regions gave a short introduction on the current situation, recent developments, and challenges for the future:

- Re: climate change indicators/obstacles and initiatives regarding mitigation and adaptation/biodiversity/use of energy resources/ etc.;
- With a special focus in challenges for peace building (conflict prevention);
- With examples of successful or failed actions by NGO's, churches, and
- Pax Christi partners plus the EU project
<http://www.comece.eu/europeinfos/en/archive/issue135/article/3791.html>

1.1 Balkan: Milan Scekic ("Zelena Agenda" Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Milan represented Peace Trees, a non-government organisation in Sarajevo, which has the focus that people should love themselves as well express love with nature. Peace Trees developed the Green Agenda in order to further protect the environment in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) as well as stimulate awareness of the country's population. Their project is financially supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dutch Kingdom. Approximately 22 countries in Europe are involved in the Green Agenda project. The goal is to also reach countries in Asia. The project is based on Agenda 21 and on the Action Plan adopted by the United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2002, which resulted in an international convention.

"Agenda 21 contains several principles such as (1) care for the quality of the environment; (2) the care for the future (generations) is a moral obligation, ecological, and social justice should go hand in hand; (3) small communities are challenged to set up their own eco-projects and feel that they govern their own future; (3) economic justice and social justice should go hand in hand, i.e. all goods should be shared in a fair way also in relation to social justice. To protect our planet is a must. The European Union offers documents related to strengthening democracy, accessibility of information, participation in decision-making processes, access to justice procedures, etc. The Earth Charter of March 2000 could also be an inspiration for action. These documents and platforms can be used for further debate and proposals. Either way, humanity must choose its future!



The Green Agenda or “Zelena Agenda U BiH” is seen as an ongoing process and that should contribute to environmental protection. It is a dynamic project which partially locally financed. The key question is its implementation. Zavidovići, a town, is the subject of a case study in BiH. In that town there is a factory which has an enormous negative impact on the regional environment. At the same time, this city divides the peoples because of difference on values and confrontation with the past (cfr. Communist regime). The key issues here are the quality of the forests, the water, and the green environment and their relation with the cultural tradition of the people and the region. The Zelena Agenda also has a youth section, who is involved in planting trees and maintaining drinkable water.”

Contact: NVO Sadnice Mira - Zavidovići, predstavnik Milan V. Šćekić, mobitel: 062 160 137, e-mail: sadnicem@bih.net.ba; NVO Nove Nade - Višegrad, predstavnica Mila Gračanin, mobitel: 065 923 979, e-mail: teledomvgd@paleol.net; http://www.greenagenda.net/bosnia_herzegovina/, <http://www.greenagenda.net/wp/>, <http://milieukontakt.net/en/>.

1.2 Caucasus: Abdulla Duduyev (Centre of Caucasian Initiative, Moscow, Russian Federation). Abdulla spoke in Russian, which was translated into English by Annemarie Gielen (Pax Christi Flanders, Belgium).

“During the last two decades, Chechnya has experienced two wars and much has been destroyed. Military movement has destroyed flora and fauna, affecting vital parts of the environment. By the end of the war, it became extremely difficult to cultivate vegetables and other crops.” Abdulla expressed that the damage was so extensive, that the type of bomb that seemed to be unaccounted for in the war “was a nuclear one”.

“The use of forbidden arms have contributed to the destruction of the natural environment and wounded thousands of people. Forests have been cut and landmines were placed on thousands of acres of land, creating mass soil erosion. About 20,000 people have been physically wounded by these landmines. The Red Cross and some NGOs work actively on this problem with the focus ‘De-mine the country!’ The conclusion here is that military operations have a significant impact on the environment.

Chechnya’s rich oil fields have also become an issue. When local people started private oil businesses, the quality and protection of the environment became very low. Sequentially, the poor environment supported the emergence of cancer and strange diseases, primarily impacting middle aged women. Pregnant women and their unborn children are also affected, as many of these children are born with a handicap. No real investigations have been undertaken by authorities in respects to these issues.

There are an insufficient amount of medical specialists in Chechnya. Those who have the means travel to Moscow for medical treatment. However, the hospitals there are often found to be very expensive and laden in corruption.”

Abdullah calls for egalitarianism and more public participation. “There is almost no social privilege to address ecological problems”, he said.

“The Centre of Caucasian Initiative has a project on garbage. Local Chechnya non-government organisations are invited to join in that project. The press is currently not interested, and according to Russian politicians, environmentalism is not a priority, but one of the aims of the project is to increase awareness and advocate on behalf of ecological problems to Russian authorities.”

1.3 Reflection given by Michael Striebel (Pax Christi Austria)

Read the contribution in English at 2011-0216. Can also be downloaded here [Michaels Vukovar-Paper \(final version\)](#)

2. Reading ecologically the ‘signs of the time’: a matter of faith

“For us climate justice – becoming a major condition for ‘just peace’ - is basically a matter of ethics, inspired by faith, and lived as expression of an ‘eco-spirituality’. What moves us in depth to care for Creation? A reflection on the spirituality of ‘eco-justice’”.

Resource Person: Jef Felix, Member Executive Committee (Belgium):

Eco-Justice: Ecological challenges for justice and peace in the region: WHAT IS CHRISTIAN ECO-SPIRITUALITY?

1. “Eco-spirituality is, for a start, a portrayal of the world and mankind, i.e. a conviction and a personal basic attitude, that results from the clear realisation and the heartfelt experience that our earth, all life, all Creation and we ourselves are part of a larger whole. A communion. Thus, a matter of sharing a common destiny, the conviction that our destiny is connected to this larger whole.
2. Subsequently this intuition and experience is deepened from within a deeply rooted belief. This Larger Whole is experienced by us, Christians, – in our inner self, in the silence of our heart, in meditation and prayer, in the liturgical celebrations, etc. – as a revelation of a loving God who safeguards His Creation and wants to bring it to fulfilment, together with us and with the whole of Creation. Attention and care for all that has been created, including anything that goes wrong, evokes in the meditating human the longing to meet God in the mystery of life. Christian eco-spirituality is a spirituality of “That they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10, 10), putting connectedness and loving handling of the earth and nature central, in God’s name and together with God.
3. Finally, eco-spirituality worthy of the name results in the inevitable ethically sound strive to and in a concrete elaboration of just and peaceful relations, in all their complexity, with our planet earth and with our fellow human beings wherever they are on the planet, with a preferential option for the poorest. Our way of life should focus on sustainability, among others on the preservation of natural resources. Furthermore, by means of worldwide political agreements to remove the structural causes of the environmental crisis, we can live with all

living creatures on earth in a more sustainable way and in a way more worthy of Creation, including “If you want to cultivate peace, protect Creation”. (Pope Benedict XVI, 1 January 2010).

4. Only then will we preserve life on the planet earth in a respectful way for the next generations. A ‘holy’ duty. Holy, meaning “from God” and “from within God”. For the relation with God and our relation with God in earthly and worldly connectedness is at stake. Eco-spirituality is simply: Take Care of Creation! There are so many things to be done.”

(A more comprehensive paper is available: “Eco-Spirituality from a Christian point of view”, 14 pages – see document 2011-0248).

3. Brief debate

Participants reflected on the different contributions from three regional resource persons and on eco-spirituality. A foremost remark was that we regard ourselves too highly. Are we anthropocentric? God is the Creator and religion should function as a liberator. We should seek space for God as part of our spiritual life. When people become more and more self centric, the abuse of nature is the result.

“Our Christian religion is anthropocentric”, Michael Strieber said. “The picture or image we have of God is based on our own personal experiences.”

From the participant’s testimonies, it became clear that the problems in each of the European regions were different. “You cannot compare the environment destruction of Chechnya with the Balkans and Western Europe. We are dealing with an imbalance of realities and challenges. “

A participant stated that we relate to nature as if it’s without a soul. “People should be educated to love nature. It has become clear that the protection of nature is strong within secular society and rather weak among believers from different faiths and religions.”

Jef Felix concluded that there is a need for a balance or good relation between God and nature. “Balancing between anthropo-monism and anthropo-centrism, the latter in compliance with the unique role God Creator entrusted man – created at God’s image - in order to become co-creator with God in a caring and loving relationship with Creation.”

4. Signs of hope in action: individually and as church/religion related Pax Christi

4 working groups reflected and planned for action. Participants were invited to discuss the possible “priorities” within the following list of 10 possible goals:

1. We want to raise awareness to the ecological problems in the area.
2. We want to raise awareness of the impact environmental problems have whether or not violent conflict erupts.

3. We want to raise awareness of the impact of the ecosystem on poverty and wealth.
4. We want to build on an ethics of eco-spirituality, in order to open-up new perspectives on care for Creation.
5. We want to identify the most pressing environmental problems in the region. By doing so, we want to promote action.
6. We want to give examples of good practices, so all become inspired to act themselves.
7. We want to define the role of the churches and church related organisations in order to work together in a more coordinated manner and strive towards the same goal: eco-justice.
8. We hope all of you will share your stories on ecology and justice, so we can learn from one another.
9. We want to give an incentive for local action.
10. We want to share in an open atmosphere opinions on eco-justice and eco-spirituality.

5. Plenary reporting, conclusions and follow up

4 Group's reporting on flip charts.

Priorities of Group 1:

1. Raise awareness on ecological problems in general.
2. Importance of an ethics of eco-spirituality and the values in general. For instance the importance of the value of life.
3. Create an open atmosphere for further discussions and debate on eco-justice.
4. Develop good practices and share positive stories.
5. Local action is needed.

Priorities of Group 2:

1. There is a potential for inter-faith cooperation in the region, and that can include civil society. Cooperation across faith communities is a desired goal.
2. Focus on the realities and consequences of the damage done by war and violent conflict. E.g. The presence of landmines and the increasing prevalence of diseases. The pollution is so high that there are almost no birds in the sky!
3. Create the potential towards a green economy. Wars are combined with poor economies. Envision a healthy future.
4. Build further partnerships. Privatisation of our economy is stimulated by the European Union. Is the privatisation of water for instance a desired goal? Many laws that have been developed do not always reflect a possible or more productive future.
5. What could be a starting point for a conversation with all parties involved in this debate?

Priorities of Group 3:

1. Make the link of environmental issues to peace and war. Violent conflicts are destroying people and land.
2. Stimulate the change in mentalities. "We do not need our own land." Sharing of sources and solidarity.
3. Education and formation on environmental issues.

Priorities of Group 4:

This group did not discuss the priorities in the list of goals suggested. The major concern of the participants was the human factor, the social factor, and the need of a process of healing in the aftermath of recent wars and conflicts and the region (i.e. personal healing for those who lost their friends and family members).

"There are the deep divisions in villages and communities. The divisions are real. So the major question is: how to bridge the still very much alive cleavages between different communities, religious denominations, and amongst people in neighbourhoods?" In summary:

1. Healing comes first.
2. Reality of gaps between the communities and the need for bridging.
3. Different forms of identities have in fact brought them to fight one another.

The conclusion is: look at the consequences of the war and try to overcome the pain, the suffering. Not neglecting the ecological issues. First steps should be taken on social and human healing and later on issues such as the environment will become a concern as well.

5. General Conclusions summarised by Jef Felix

Healing can be part of ecological resourcing. There is no contradiction between healing process and care for creation. There is a need to seek for a common ground. The following potential fields for action could be taken into consideration:

- Awareness raising, change of mentality, based on values = conversion, metanoia (Greek), ecological conversion.
- Education, care for future generations.
- Local action. Towards a green economy.
- Appeal to political leaders making structural changes.
- The importance of personal experiences and sharing of these with others.
- Focus on liberation. The human being is born free. The earth has to be liberated as well.
- Need for a strategic plan to be prepared by a small group (Milan, Wiltrud, Jef, Paul).

6. After this session, the following outcomes were:

1. Participants in the seminar have a new view on ecology, justice, and peace.

2. Some of the participants decided to take the initiative to instigate awareness campaigns, discussion groups, or personal reflection papers on the matter.
3. By identifying the most pressing problems in the region, it is hoped that these issues are addressed by the participants in order to lobby their local governments.
4. It is hoped that ecology will gain a place within peacebuilding and poverty reduction projects.
5. Networks of religions/churches and/or church related organisations will be used so that believers can work together to reach the common goal of increased eco-justice. Pax Christi International could function as one of such networks.
6. Participants were inspired by the personal stories of each and further sharing individual experiences was recommended. The ongoing project of Pax Christi International on developing peace spirituality and peace theology could be linked here.
7. In the Balkans region: the importance of bringing people together and experiencing normal life. Ecological awareness begins with individual awareness.

Annex

The Budapest Ecumenical Youth Declaration

- Addressing Poverty, Wealth and Ecology

“In response to the call to raise the voice of young people on climate justice, we the young delegates of WCC-CEC consultation ‘Poverty, Wealth and Ecology’, representing young Christians in Europe through the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe, World Student Christian Federation Europe Region and SYNDESMOS, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, present the following contribution to be taken into account in the process of the global ecumenical AGAPE consultation.

Our disharmony with God and Creation has led to a deeply complex global crisis, which calls for urgent action. The following statement was addressed to the participants of the WSCF-E and EYCE joint study session Climate Justice Now!:

‘As young Christians we acknowledge that we should be agents of change, living examples and multipliers of a sustainable way of life. Solidarity and social justice on local, national, and global levels should be manifested through education, prayer, lobbying, and sharing our expertise.

We call upon CEC, WCC, and the global ecumenical community to:

- Be the headliner and example in living according to the sufficient way of life, “principles of enough” and just treatment of all the Creation.

- Address the poverty and economic injustice on global level as the main underlying factor of climate change. Embracing solidarity on a personal, local, and worldwide level must be the first step in the global transformation process.
- Initiate and strengthen the dialogue with the stakeholders through enabling and empowering the churches to bring the local realities, good practices, and expertise into this dialogue, thus working for possible joint solutions.
- Approach education from a broader perspective by building a knowledgeable society for economic and social justice and solidarity, through formal, non-formal and informal education, i.e. school programmes, youth activities, volunteering, media, art, family, pastoral work, etc. The churches have the capacity and role to play in shaping all of these sectors.
- Provide more opportunities for youth to participate contribute and influence CEC's work on poverty, wealth and ecology as young people and youth organisations have enthusiasm, possibilities and methodology to reach out to groups in society, which are not always accessible for churches and official structures.'

We as young people, and representatives of the churches on the grassroots level and in the local structures, commit ourselves to strive to fulfil these recommendations.”

Declared in WCC-CEC consultation on “Poverty, Wealth and Ecology”, Budapest, 12th of November 2010.

Developing Peace Spirituality and Peace Theology

Date: 28th April 2011

Chair: Sr. Filo Hirota

Minutes: Mark Barwick

1. Pax Christi International and Peace Spirituality

Participants were asked to prepare for this workshop by reading ‘Developing Peace Spirituality and Theology’ (Ref. 2011-0197). *International Co-President Marie Dennis* opened the session by saying that the development of a spirituality of peace continues to be a priority for Pax Christi.

“We have set in motion a process for reflecting on our experiences of actively practising non-violence and on what motivates us to do what we do as a peace movement. How do we experience God’s presence or absence when confronted with violent conflicts? How are we transformed in and through the transformation of conflict and reconciliation? These reflections and stories are important for us to capture and make available to inspire the Pax Christi movement in others.

We want to elicit resources for a positive theology of peace from the experiences of those who have lived in diverse settings. We have invited these witnesses to describe their own peace spirituality, its core elements for genuine peace building, their motivation and inspiration for peace, and to give us examples of what has worked for them in the journey towards peace, on an individual and social level.”

2. Witnesses to a Spirituality of Peace

Jelena Vilenskaja spoke of her experience of working with the House of Peace in St Petersburg, Russia. In the aftermath of the Novye Aldi massacre near Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, the House of Peace launched a campaign for Peace and Goodness and organised school exchanges and other joint projects to show another face of St Petersburg. These efforts have met with considerable success and continue to inspire others toward peace.

Fr. Danilo Pavlović of the Orthodox Monastery in Žitomislići spoke of the suffering of people during the war in nearby Mostar. Houses were burned, churches and monasteries were

destroyed, and many people were killed. Fr. Danilo returned to Mostar as a young monk, charged with reconstructing the monastery. More importantly, he soon found the task of reconstructing relations between Croats, Serbs, and Bosnians more crucial:

“There may have been a cessation of overt hostilities, but there were clearly barriers remaining in peoples’ minds and hearts. The Serbian community began to return to Croatia, but were living in marginal conditions. There was a need to rebuild infrastructure and the strong desire, amongst returning Serbs, to re-establish a normal way of life. The Church played an important role in teaching the people how to learn to accept one another and to live among one another in peace.”

Fr. Danilo reflected on the experience of visiting the mass gravesite of the patients who were taken from the Vukovar hospital and executed. “It is important to go to these sites and to share in solidarity with others,” he said. “The perpetrators of such crimes were not like most people from the region, but extremists, and those in power with a twisted political agenda. The violence itself was short-lived, but the return to normalcy has proven to be a long and hard road.” His expressed that his witness reinforced his desire to have no part in such violence. “Even if we take small steps toward peace, it can leave a big impression. We must never give up, even when we are lonely and misunderstood. The potential is always present to live in peace.”

Amra Pandžo spoke of her experience as a Muslim, who lives in Sarajevo and works toward peaceful understanding between ethnic and religious communities in the region. She asked the group to be seated in a circle for her presentation, because Prophet Mohammed sat with his friends in a circle to assure equality and preserve every individual’s right to express him or herself. “Group circles are a non-violent form of communication, because once a part of it, one cannot hide behind another. “

She stated that the Qur’an speaks of unconditional love. “God created humanity in different tribes so that it could meet one another. However, during the war other teachings were introduced from Arab countries. People began to dress differently, separate themselves, and be more cautious toward others. Then after 11 September 2001, Muslims were mistrusted more.” The transformation pushed her to embark on a spiritual journey and to explore the roots of her faith.

“In Islam, a leeway is given for personal responsibility and making decisions between good and evil.” She could not justify violence in the name of Islam. She decided instead to put aside fear and to speak openly against the extremist cells that were growing in number.

3. Reflection and Sharing in Small Groups

After each of the session’s witnesses’ presentations, the participants were asked to consider questions such as: “After hearing this witness, what words echo in your mind?” and “What am I feeling now?”

Next, participants were organised into small groups and invited to discuss the following questions:

a) Which situation of conflict, violence, or war has deeply touched you or challenged you? Describe this situation in its complexity and your own feelings, responses, and other experiences. How did you react to this situation? What was your attitude towards the use of violence? What was the meaning of nonviolence in this situation?

b) How did you experience God in this situation or process? Or God’s absence? Or God’s “coming-and-going”? Has your understanding of God been changed by the process or situation? In addition, have you noticed a change in the way you pray, celebrate the liturgy, experience Christian community, or your understanding of being a part of the Church?

c) What inspires and motivates you on the journey towards peace? How would you describe your own spirituality in relation to peace? (Your understanding of God, the human condition, worldview, creation, good and evil, etc.) Mention some examples your own experiences and methods of peace building which were most successful.

4. Theological Reflection

Fr. Ivo Markovic, founder of the Pontanima Choir in Sarajevo, presented a schematic, interdisciplinary, and functional reflection on spirituality, tracing the believer’s conversion from fear and mistrust toward love and solidarity. The theological model proposed was the example of Christ, who in the face of violence refused the prerogative of divine power, confounding all expectations, and instead chose non-resistance. This model can also be placed against the experience of war, violence and reconciliation in the Balkans. The spiral of

violence is reversed and reconciliation is more possible to the degree that the quest for power is set aside in favour of peace.

Finally, Fr. Ivo spoke of how people experience the complex cycle of injury, healing, and reconciliation and the psychological, social, and spiritual resources that are necessary to overcome the trauma and hatred of war. The transformation starts when people turn away from focusing on the enemy and the past, and instead considers themselves and what is necessary for a new and more positive orientation towards peace.

5. Closing Liturgy – led by *International Co-President Mgr. Kevin Dowling*

Towards Restorative Justice and Reconciliation

An important topic during the Central and Eastern European Consultation was “Restorative Justice and Reconciliation.” Pax Christi International brought together church representatives, church related initiatives, faith-based organisations, independent intellectuals, and representatives of civil society organisations. To this point, dialogue between them has remained very feeble. This meeting gave participants the necessary infrastructure to meet, discuss, and think about further steps to be taken. The session was opened by Mr. Željko Sabo, Mayor of Vukovar, Mr. Božo Galić, Principal of Vukovar district, and by Msgr. Hranic, representing Msgr. Srakic, the President of the Croatian Bishops’ Conference in the Archdiocese of Djakovacko, Osijek. One of the key note addresses was delivered by Msgr. Kevin Dowling, Co-President of Pax Christi International. This address is available in English Ref. [2011-0239-engl-PB](#) and Spanish Ref. [2011-0239-sp-gl-PB](#).

Date: 29 April 2011

Chair: Marie Dennis and Katarina Kruhonja (morning).

Report: Paul Lansu

Katarina Kruhonja mentioned the importance of this session and of being together in Vukovar. She was glad that this meeting could take place because much peace work still needs to be done in the region. What were particularly important were the issues of healing, reconciliation, and bringing people together. She invited all participants to be receptive.

A word of welcome was expressed by a local Franciscan priest. He thanked God that this meeting could take place in Vukovar. “20 years ago, weapons were doing the talking [in the region],” he said. “Today we see the different initiatives in looking more and more to the other, taking care for the other, building trust among the people, building unity also in the city. Vukovar experiences already a high level of tolerance, but this is not enough and more need to be done”. The priest said that “We should all be one,” and the goal is to reach the hearts of all citizens of the city.

Marie Dennis stated that coming together in Vukovar was an opportunity. She made the opening prayers and invited all participants to introduce themselves. Delegates came from the Russian Federation (including Chechnya), Lithuania, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, and Bosnia & Herzegovina. They were joined by members of Pax Christi sections from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy, and by members of the Executive Committee and International Secretariat staff. About 80 participants in total attended. Marie added a reference to the Strategic Framework of Pax Christi International. The main expectation of

the session was not to be exclusive, but inclusive. “Croatia a peace project? Peace activists become very weary, but more democracy is on its way.”

Purpose of the Session:

One of the foremost motives for the session was linked to the town where the session took place: Vukovar. Vukovar is a Croatian town that was destroyed by Serbian forces 20 years ago. In the recent past, pictures of hundreds of exhausted civilians evacuating a destroyed Vukovar shocked people around the world.

At present time, Vukovar became a symbol for “remembering,” however this “remembering” is not simply retrospective and historic. The town remains divided, and its wounds from the war have yet to heal. However, citizens and local governments have made efforts towards building inter-ethnic trust, inspiring a future of hope.

Pax Christi International’s goal with the Consultation was to provide a safe space in which this sensitive topic could be discussed between church representatives, church related initiatives, faith-based organisations, independent intellectuals, and representatives of civil society organisations. Before the Consultation, dialogue between these mentioned stakeholders has remained very weak. This meeting gave participants the necessary infrastructure to meet, discuss, and think about further steps to be taken.

The Objectives of the Session:

Sharing experiences on healing and how to deal with the (violent) past;

- Bring church and religious leaders together to discuss the different processes towards peace and reconciliation in their communities;
- Share examples of positive experiences with Truth and Reconciliation Commissions;
- Assist local communities in involving civil societies in constructive processes towards peace and justice;
- Update and revise the Pax Christi Publication “Peace and Justice: On the Dilemmas in Peace Negotiations.”

Opening of the Session:

The session was opened by Mr. Željko Sabo, Mayor of Vukovar, Mr. Božo Galić, Principal of Vukovar district, and by Msgr. Hranic, representing Msgr. Srakic, the President of the Croatian Bishops’ Conference in the Archdiocese of Djakovacko, Osijek.

1. Mr. Božo Galić spoke first because he received a delegation of the European Union (Danube group) that day. He was very satisfied that this conference could take place in Vukovar. “This is a historic place to be, and [a historic time] to talk about our common future. It is expected that the conclusions from this meeting will have a broad effect on the past and the truth for all of us living here. Cross border initiatives are needed in budding peace and restorative justice.”

2. Mr. Željko Sabo said that “Vukovar is a special town which is deep in the hearts of the people”. “The war started here 20 years ago. Today, there are still a lot of mixed feelings and emotions. The suffering is still there. The hospital of Vukovar became a symbol of the fall of the city on 18 November 1991. 200 people from Vukovar hospital were executed that day. Simultaneously, people were invited to forgive one another. Vukovar is both a loser and a winner of the war.

On 15 January 1998, when peaceful re-integration of this region of Croatia was completed, the people of Vukovar had the chance to start living in peace and in tolerance again. Still, Vukovar has a lot of displaced and missing people. Restoration of justice which includes peace and tolerance cannot be found without God of love in our hearts.”

3. Msgr. Hranic welcomed all participants on behalf of the President of the Croatian Bishops’ Conference. “Vukovar is a symbol of resistance and of memorizing all the victims of war”. The bishop stated that all those who committed crimes have to be judged. “Selectivity on this is not acceptable.” He mentions the following important aspects as crucial in building restorative justice and peace: “(1) The truth needs to be known - seek the truth: who started the war? Who is the aggressor and who are the victims? (2) Justice needs to be established. That cannot be done by selective approaches or judgments. Guilds cannot be equalised; (3) Assistance to all victims should be given. All parties involved in the war need to know the truth, especially about their beloved ones.

This meeting can be helpful in stimulating dialogue in order to restore justice and to reach the truth. In the end God will judge on our actions. By working together, progress can be reached.”

Referring on the need for seeking truth and justice, Msgr. Hranic made references to the recent United Nation’s war crimes tribunal convictions of two former Croatian generals over atrocities committed “as one joint criminal enterprise”. The Croatian Conference of Bishops argued that the verdict did not contribute to establishing truth and justice. “Namely, the bishops, as well as majority of citizens of Croatia, consider that this verdict judges the entire liberation offensive as a joint criminal enterprise. Further, bishops have expressed concern that such a verdict may be interpreted in a way that the defensive war, which was run by Croatia, could be also be declared ‘a joint criminal enterprise’”.¹

¹On 15 April 2011, two former top Croatian generals were convicted and sentenced to lengthy jail terms by United Nations war crimes tribunal (International Crime Tribunal for former Yugoslavia, ICTY) over atrocities carried out against ethnic Serb civilians during a military liberating offensive of the one part of Croatian territory in 1995. Judge Alphons Orie, who presided over the trial, said that the case was not about the legality of resorting to and conducting war. Judges serving on the ICTY trial

Two background documents related to this were distributed:

- “Bishops call for calm after ICTY renders verdict for Croatian generals” in 2011-0252.
- Statement by the Croatian Conference of Bishops on The Hague’s Verdict”, 20 April 2011, in 2011-0253.

Key-addresses on Restorative Justice and Reconciliation:

1. Msgr. Kevin Dowling, Co-President of Pax Christi International
 - Written contribution “Towards Restorative Justice and Reconciliation: Transitional Justice and Catholic Social Teaching: An Important Dialogue” in 2011-0239.
 - Power Point Presentation “Towards Restorative Justice and Reconciliation” in 2011-0240.
2. Fra Mijo Đolan, Franciscan Institute for Peace. Split, Croatia.

Fra Mijo Đolan spoke from a Franciscan point of view: “One day our people will overcome their negative sentiments. The suffering of the people is very deep and needs to be healed. We believe that one day we will reach the moment of reconciliation.

Saint Francis stands for justice and truth. ‘Love’ is the only relation that can help: ‘One needs to kneel for every human being.’ What is it that people do that but oppose to one another? Is it racism? Is it extreme nationalism ending up in war when that becomes an ideology? Our divisions (or differences) are based on religion and ethnics. There is the role of preventing conflicts.

How can we restore the human dignity after such a lot of suffering? What about the perpetrators and their restorative dignity? We need to seek models and examples for living together with the other. The city of Vukovar can be such a model. Healing has to be done by individuals and by the society as a whole. People who are searching for reconciliation are, in many cases, seen by their own people as perpetrators.

chamber found Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac guilty of committing a joint criminal enterprise (together with several key politicians from the Croatian political leadership of that time, including then President Franjo Tudjman) - various crimes against humanity, including murder, persecutions, deportation and plunder. Both were acquitted of charges of inhumane acts. The joint trial of the three former generals was one of the ICTY’s longest, beginning in March 2008 and concluding in September last year. The tribunal, which is based in The Hague, has concluded proceedings against 125 people and is still conducting proceedings against 34 others.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=38125&Cr=icty&Cr1>

Reconciliation without justice is not possible. The open wounds can be healed wrongly as well. We have to be very careful on working with parts of the truth. Sometimes people need a ‘second operation,’ a second conversion.

The Dayton Agreement of 14 December 1995 was not rational, at least for some of us. There was a lack of understanding amongst the international community. At the time there was a lack of vision of the national politicians in the region.

Our people still have to live with at least two traumas – one from the Second World War and from the recent war. An example is the small town Rama in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1942 Chetnics (Serbian forces in alliance with Mussolini) killed 916 people in Rama and more than 700 in neighbouring villages. In 1992, most Croats escaped out of Rama before the armed conflict started. The inspiration for escape was the memory of the event in 1942: when these people decided to stay in their homes and were subsequently attacked. As result of this event, this area is sparsely populated by Croats – today the majority are Bosnians. There is a resettlement policy for Croats. This example shows how trauma influences the behaviour of people and community and illustrates the consequences – a spiral of violence and injustice.”

3. Vesna Teršelič (Documenta- Center for dealing with Past and Regional Coalition for RECOM)

“The city of Vukovar is seen as the hope for healing. With the goodwill of people, a process of peace building can be realised step by step. Sometimes you have to take a step backwards. This is a part of life.

Some court verdicts can cause unrest. People need to have the facts of the crime, which is an essential right. People have the right to truth. Families have the right to know what happened during the war. We have to understand the events of the past. We can expect this from Courts, but this is certainly not enough. Courts can still make mistakes and are at times in need of correction. For example, the latest judgment from The Hague Tribunal needs further reflection. We need to learn more about what happened in wars in the Yugoslavia of the 1990s. Also, people are still hurt from the Second World War. Generations keep the memory of their suffering alive, which is another discussion.

Documenta is the project that supports the individual and social processes of dealing with the past, with the focus on the healing processes and preventing new violence.

Not all wounds from the past have been healed. Work on the Second World War still needs to be done. Wounds need to be recognised, and in that process it is important that we look at the past. In these processes small steps are needed and are possible. The exact facts can heal. People also need to understand that sometimes it is possible that facts can not be found. Truth commissions are not perfect but can be of great help. These lessons need to be learned. However, what we have learned is that the most powerful source of motivation on this path to healing is solidarity with all victims.

There also are the rights of suffering victims. There is still a massive number of missing people. More information must be found on the missing people, otherwise genuine healing is not possible. That also demands the care for these victims' families.”

Vesna Teršelič invited all of the participants to sign a petition where the civil society asks for the truth about the victims. “New steps still need to be taken. We need to find new paths to heal. Courts only decide on legal issues. Civil society has to go deeper and be repentant for the victims' pain and suffering. Victims of both sides of the conflict should be part of the healing process.”

Round Table: Towards Restorative Justice and Reconciliation with Participants

From different denominations, religions and civil society organizations.

1. Mons Dr. Mato Zovkić, Professor of Catholic Faculty of Theology and Vicar of Sarajevo Archdiocese for relations with other faith communities, BiH. Member of Interreligious Council of BiH. Read the contribution in Croatian language Restorative Justice in Plural Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina at 2011-0256.

Together with the Catholic bishops of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the political representatives of the Croatian people in BiH, Msgr. Dr. Zovkić believes that the “*Dayton agreement ended the cruel war for ethnic territory but did not bring a just peace.*”

“War in BiH resulted in ethnic cleaned regions. Even 20 years after the war, democratically elected political representatives can not agree which kind of state is possible and necessary for BiH. Therefore the constructive presence of the representatives of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) is still necessary in encouraging the process of transitional justice. The restorative approach towards justice seeks a balance between the needs of victims, the perpetrators, and the community in a way that preserves the safety and dignity of all. It can be gradually established and supported by state institutions, civil society, and religious communities.

A recent publication by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Guide to Transitional Justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo 2011, UNDP web site) lists the measures implemented by the states. The role of civil society is widely and highly recognised. The role of religious communities, however, has been criticized because of their ‘general inactivity towards the promotion of transitional justice mechanisms.’

Left-oriented religion sociologists and politicians resented the Nationalist Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim religious leaders in Bosnia. These leaders sought the right to warn their countrymen of trouble. On the other hand, it is aware that foreign troops could help in ending the armed conflict and international diplomats could keep the peace. However, they can not build a lasting reconciliation and trust between members of ethnic and religious communities. This is a unique opportunity for religious leaders, imams, priests, and catechists. An integral part of education should be the courage to deal with the violence committed by ‘ours’ against ‘theirs’. Now we have a situation where some war veterans

regard one group as war heroes, but see another group as war criminals. Serbs in Bosnia are cross with The Hague Court because of its verdicts against their fellow nationals. Croats in Bosnia hold a similar sentiment regarding of the verdicts against Croats and Bosniaks, and are even more incensed because their nationals were summoned to court or are under investigation by the State Court of BiH. How do we accept convictions against our own and remain ready for integration in a pluralistic society? Can we imagine others' suffering?"

Mons. Zovkić refers to the Compendium of the Holy See that says that our world should be ruled by solidarity. "Peacemaking, by example and Jesus' teachings, means to ask for forgiveness and to forgive. We should recognise the rights and duties of human beings. We should not only demand solidarity, but exercise it. Somewhere in that framework is restorative justice."

2. Anna Raffai Regional interfaith initiative "Building Peace, Praise God" (Zagreb, Croatia).

"Building Peace, Praise God is a grass roots interfaith initiative. We think that in working for peace and peace creation, we praise God. We try to enact what we preach.

The project supports people from different denominations and religions who come together. By bringing people together for worship, we work on the conditions for peace. Reconciliation has an interfaith connection which has great potential for peace building.

We see daily conflicts, of course. And we also see and experience a lack of knowledge and skill on how to deal with these conflicts.

If there is high level of air pollution, this does not mean that I, you, or we should not use a bicycle or that my, your, and our contributions to reduction of pollution is not relevant. On the contrary. This idea also applies to nonviolence. Nonviolence is a value that needs to be taught. People need to be trained, especially those who lived for years in conflict areas.

Our meetings should result in better communication. Forgiveness and reconciliation are essential tools in our work. There is only one way to go and that is the way of reconciliation."

3. Milanka Šaponja Hadžić (reporter, Belgrade, Serbia)

Milanka held high expectations for the Consultation and believed that "Pax Christi International can assist our people in this region". She has been a journalist for about 20 years. She works with non-government organizations that hold different opinions. Milanka participated in meetings that involved religious communities. She noticed different views there as well.

“RECOM is a campaign for a truth commission to examine abuses committed during the wars of Yugoslavia’s dissolution. RECOM is a broad civil society initiative from all parts of former Yugoslavia. It has been supported by other non-state actors. It’s felt that at times politicians can complicate matters.

To understand one another is the first step.” Milanka stated that religious leaders from the region did not meet one another for years! “How can we unify and be creative in bringing religious leaders together? Our ‘relationships’ should be linked with ‘justice’ and ‘forgiveness.’ Relations should be seen as the basic concept of living together. Would it be possible for Pax Christi International to bring religious leaders together? How can we achieve that? What could be seen as a common ground for the religious leaders and their communities?”

Brief debate:

Mons. Zovkić is a participant of the Commission of Roman Catholic bishops with Orthodox Bishops. He expressed his willingness to talk with other religious leaders. He is not incensed about their absence from the Consultation and respects their motives. “As Catholic community, we cannot urge others to do something against their will. However, it is now the Serbian Orthodox Bishops turn to take initiative.”

He asked, “How do we deal with sentencing individual crimes when the verdict for the initial act of aggression has not been passed? It may seem as though someone wants to equate the responsibility of the aggressor to that of the defender. Punishment is necessary otherwise we have impunity. The truth needs to be revealed.” He repeated that the Hague Tribunal’s latest indictment lacked in judgment.

“Pax Christi friends in Dervente say that the situation in BiH is still very fragile. Peace building is needed even more than before. The question is: what more can be done in the near future?”

Katarina answered that an open discussion needs to come first. “We need to listen to another and try to understand what each other are saying”. Milanka stated that “Ultimately, there is a lack for respect for the victims.”

Round Table Towards Restorative Justice and Reconciliation: Continuation

Chair: Bishop Kevin Dowling and Katarina Kruhonja (afternoon)

Participants in discussion are from different denominations, religions and civil society organizations (see list of invitees in document 2011-0164).

“Special peace education should be given in schools. Children of different ethnicities do not know one another. Working with children should also be related to the development of personal awareness. We are still confronted by exclusiveness. Convey the message of this conference and go to the youth.

Fragmentation should be prevented. Barriers among the people should be prevented as well. You can say that we are going through a moral crisis and that could end in something new and better. There is an issue of accountability towards our own and our Creator.

The RECOM Coalition is doing fine work. But ‘reconciliation’ can also cause fear in us. The word ‘reconciliation’ can hurt the victims. So the question is: what is our concept of reconciliation? That needs to be explained. The notion of ‘truth’ is also problematic. What is the correct truth? This means that working with victims is not an easy thing to do. They always feel the pain and hurt. Each one of us has his or her own truth. But next to truth one needs the necessary tolerance as well.

People are still suffering. They are confronted with the fragmentation of life. And each division can be a source for another new conflict or tension. It might be more accommodating to say ‘living in a reconciling way’. The challenge is to live with conflicts. Each day you need to make choices. It is a permanent struggle to forgive. Mixed feelings are part of daily life in the region: revenge and forgiveness.

In Chechnya, there are no memorials or monuments dedicated to the most recent Chechen wars. About 250,000 people died in the war, of which were 40,000 children. According to NGOs, 18,000 people are missing. But according to officials, that number is 5,000. The government’s message on the war is that it was fighting terrorists, peace exists today, and there is no need to look back. No much is being said about the victims.

Chechens live with the scars of a number of traumas. For instance, Stalin deporting Chechens and others groups in 1944, and later, the two wars in Chechnya. These people are expected to forget their past. They are given no starting point to heal. This is in contrast to the Balkans, where the people are able to talk with one other.

Chechnya is regarded as the forgotten conflict – a conflict that is not mentioned. This undoubtedly has impact on the entire Russian Federation. Pax Christi International should put more emphasis on the situation in the North Caucasus.

The NGO dealing with missing people is doing excellent work. If the missing loved ones can be found and identified, this will help victims move forward. However, many young people leave Vukovar because of its high level of unemployment. In the past, Vukovar had a strong industrial activity, but due to the war, this is no longer the case.

It is clear that all war crimes should be judged. The loss is still apparent. Wives are without their husbands. Children are without their fathers.

A delegate stated that she was treated like an animal during the war, but her faith helped her keep her dignity. Dignity and basic humanistic values can not be exclusive from seeking the truth.

One should be critical of all communities, particularly of his or her own. A Serb participant stated how they always publicly express regret for aggression and crimes committed by Serbia in the Yugoslavia wars.”

Bishop Kevin concluded the session. “Even after 17 years of democracy in South Africa, social problems and racism are still present. Racially integrated schools can help a great deal.

The first step of reconciliation is that you agree not to kill one another. People should journey together in the direction healing. RECOM in the Balkans can establish the facts. And then, bit by bit, work towards complete healing and reconciliation.”

Outcomes and comments/insights on report “Peace and Justice”, IKV Pax Christi Netherlands.

Carline Westervelt gave a brief update on the feedback from different member organisations on the document **“Peace and Justice: The Dilemmas in Peace Negotiations”**. This document consists of a broader discussion of the dilemmas between peace and justice in peace negotiation efforts. One of the document’s conclusions is that no matter how prevalent dilemmas are in order to **create a lasting peace, the most essential issue is to include the citizens and communities in the search for peace.**

The importance of matching conflict with appropriate contextual response prompted IKV Pax Christi Netherlands to invite all our member organizations to discuss the report, relevant dilemmas within their own constituency, and their insights and additions from the context of your their country and local practices. IKV Pax Christi collected about 12 contributions. They are planning an expert seminar late August 2011.

Introduction to the Working Groups given by Prof. Dr. Kopilović.

1. The human being is the focus, especially the victims.
2. The truth’s value is as a foundation. The truth can liberate us.
3. It is accurate to assume that there are plenty of unspoken issues on the past. Silence is not productive. Much more needs to be done in Serbia.
4. Our problem is how history is written. Who is writing history? There are the winners’ approach and the losers’ approach. What is needed is a critical approach to all parties involved.
5. Education and training is another dilemma. Truth is related to the perceptions and recollection of one another other.
6. Memorials and monuments should be dedicated to the truth and to victims.
7. Restorative justice should be linked with the sources of the conflicts.
8. The word “reconciliation” is extremely important. But the word “hope” is not mentioned enough at these meetings.
9. Fear is still rules our lives. The silence in Serbia is too substantial. Fear exists. Dialogue and coming together is needed and essential in order to step past prejudices. Communication is vital.
10. Christ delivers peace: Pax Christi!

Working Groups on Good practices, Dilemmas and Perspective

Sharing in 4 Working Groups is related to the following questions:

- What supports/ enhance / encourages processes towards restorative justice and reconciliation?
- What are the main dilemmas concerning ongoing processes in the region?
- What are possibilities for follow up and cooperation (deepening dialogue; statements; activities; exchanges)?

Participants contributed their own experiences (e.g. trauma and recovery; pastoral work; ecumenism and interreligious dialogue and cooperation; community and bottom-up peace building activities; human rights work). They also regarded popular issues such as: the Hague Tribunal trials, national courts trials and regional cooperation; the RECOM initiative, material reparations, erecting memorials and symbolic actions-commemorations.

Report of Working Group 1:

- “National legal institutions lack credibility. There are high expectations for the International Tribunals, but some are disappointed.
- The RECOM Commission should establish the facts and identify the victims. Expressions such as: “we are the ‘most harmed’ victims” or “we are the ‘only’ victims” should be not expressed. NGOs have an important role in this step.
- Educational programmes are currently insufficient. There is lack of historical knowledge amongst the public. Youth need to know what happened in their region. There are youth who have never heard of Hitler, for instance. Croats do not understand the conclusions of The Hague Tribunal partly because of the lack of information and analysis.
- A stronger network of peace activists is needed. International cooperation is a must. Victims should be given psychological support, which should include compassion. It is compassion that liberates people from fear.
- It is recommended that peace organizations should take a stronger initiative to engage all religious communities in dialogue on cooperation, peace, and the reconciliation processes.”

Report of Working Group 2:

- “Retributive or restorative justice should first be realised on the ground. The state has to do its part, but our work can not rely on it. Restorative justice is a vast and long process. The dialogue should be stimulated and this is itself is a long process.
- There are additional factors of difficulty for people in the region, i.e. weak economy, high level of unemployment, the privatisation of some sectors, etc. These factors do not aid in bringing people together. The potential for solidarity has been hurt and its value is almost forgotten.”

Report of Working Group 3 (Russian group):

- “What does it mean to reconcile? What happened in the past? What went wrong? Russians are not facing the past. They are asked to forget!
- What is needed to meet and bring people together? Peace work needs to continue in small steps, day by day.”

Report of Working Group 4:

- The group consisted of participants who were not from the Balkan region. They discussed how the search for the missing people can be assisted. A reference was made to the anonymous phone methodology.
- “A major discussion on the question of ‘identities’ remains. How do people use their identity? The ongoing nation building in the Balkan countries seems to be based on past atrocities or, at the least, conflicts. The European Union could be a model in which economic collaboration becomes the tool in overcoming divisions.”

Conclusions

Participants acknowledged that seeking truth and justice is an incredibly demanding process, and learned that the most powerful source for motivation on this path is solidarity with all victims. The session highlighted three complimentary approaches to restorative justice: (1) impartial trials for war crimes; (2) fact-finding about all the victims, the missing people, and the circumstances of their calamities; (3) expressions of solidarity with victims (just reparation) and prayer for all victims in places where they were detained, tortured, or killed.

Pax Christi International Peace Award 2011

The Executive Committee of Pax Christi International and the Cardinal Bernardus Alfrink Peace Fund presented this year's award to Pontanima, the interreligious choir from Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, during a concert given in Vukovar on 29 April 2011. It is widely acclaimed as an innovative peacemaking project; and a shining representation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a major contributor to the country's cultural life, interreligious dialogue, and coexistence. Pontanima's creative work towards peace and reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Balkans, and in other places of suffering shows the positive peace-building potential of music. Music heals suffering people, directs them to the future, and reveals the authenticity of faith. Msgr. Kevin Dowling, Co-President, gave the Peace Award speech. The complete document is available in English in Ref. [2011-0148-en-eu-IC](#); in Croatian in Ref. [2011-0148-ao-eu-IC](#); in French Ref. [2011-0148-fr-eu-IC](#); and in Spanish Ref. [2011-0148-sp-eu-IC](#).