



Church and Peace

International Office

Church and Peace is a European ecumenical network made up of congregations, communities, organisations and individuals committed to active witness for peace

Nonviolence or the use of force as a ‘last resort’?

An ecumenical discussion about conflict resolution and reconciliation

Church and Peace meets the World Council of Churches

Almost 60 people from 11 European countries inside and outside the European Union – from the United Kingdom to Serbia and Russia – came together in Baarlo (The Netherlands) from 23 to 25 May 2014.

‘... *accounting for the hope that is in you*’ (1 Peter 3:15) was the theme of the conference organized by Church and Peace, a European ecumenical network of communities, organizations and individuals committed to peace-building, with strong membership from the historical Peace Churches.

The call to join a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace was presented by Kees Nieuwerth, a Quaker from the Netherlands, who had been present when it was first issued at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2013.

The pilgrimage offers a broad international framework for organizing pilgrimages in the eight years before the next WCC Assembly, e.g. to the UN conference on climate change (COP21) in Paris in 2015, or to the world’s largest weapons trade fair, also in Paris in 2016. One suggestion was to devise an interactive pilgrim map offering spiritual reassurance and encouragement, and indicating places of solidarity in view of the vulnerability of humanity and nature. This would be one way of making the many, often small and fragile initiatives visible at the European level and worldwide, declared Antje Heider-Rottwilm, chair of Church and Peace.

The conference featured a panel discussion on ‘*Just Policing*’ and *unarmed intervention: the churches’ dialogue on the responsibility to protect (R2P)*. How can people be protected from human rights violations and the breach of international humanitarian law? To answer this question, the United Nations in 2005 adopted the concept of responsibility to protect, with its three pillars of prevention, response and rebuilding. Efforts have been made to implement it in the last few years. The controversial part is the ‘responsibility to respond’, which also allows for military interventions and using force as a ‘last resort’.

It seemed questionable whether the motivation for this is R2P alone or whether this concept is not intended to legitimize further immense spending on weapons production and the military. Church and Peace shares this criticism and asks: if we hold to our witness of nonviolence what are appropriate means of intervention? Can ‘just policing’ be an option? ‘Just policing’ means that international police units would see to it that threatened populations are protected and law, public security and order is restored, while other responsible bodies and organizations try to find the root causes and to resolve the conflict.

The 10th WCC Assembly – after energetic efforts by Peace Church representatives on the spot – recommended undertaking ‘critical analysis’ of the concept of R2P and its misuse to justify armed interventions. The Peace Churches will continue to advocate for unarmed peace-building and peace-keeping missions, and help develop and take part in such undertakings.

A panel discussion between *James Jakob Fehr* from the *German Mennonite Peace Committee* and *Jonathan Frerichs*, *WCC Programme Director for Peacebuilding and Disarmament* raised two important questions. First, to what extent can 'just policing' lead us out of opposing positions *for* or *against* using force as the 'last resort'? Secondly, is it still possible to cooperate in practical terms despite different attitudes to the use of force?

Jonathan Frerichs showed that there is broad field of commitment to counteracting violence when it takes the form of human rights violations, poverty or war. At the level of practical solidarity, these options include peace missions to protect endangered population groups or practical work for reconciliation as in Serbia, about which Church and Peace members reported. Other measures are political advocacy for individuals or groups, and not least, intervening in favour of standards and treaties at the UN level, which is part of the ongoing and occasionally successful working areas of the WCC.

Frerichs continued, "The concept of shared human security may also help to bring just policing into the international agenda. Examples of successful just policing might well be taken as indicators of progress on human security." However, he went on to ask, "If today's policing depends in part on a shared vision of the common good and of domestic security, what are the multi-cultural, multi-religious and trans-national equivalents? It would seem that these are problematic prerequisites for international just policing."

Jakob Fehr focused on the 'spirituality of reconciliation'. "As long as people mistrust or hate their neighbours (the neighbouring social or political group), they will not attain peace." He drew attention, firstly, to historical and current examples of nonviolent political and social processes of transformation, and, secondly, to the work of dedicated small groups in conflict regions, such as the Christian Peacemaker Teams. Well trained in nonviolent conflict management, they go into crisis areas and are able to help in resolving confrontations and to protect and encourage the people. "We have not yet invented all forms of peaceful conflict intervention," Fehr noted. "I think that there is lots of room for new ideas to come."

By way of conclusion, Antje Heider-Rottwilm expressed her satisfaction at the results of the conference. "I am very glad about this encounter here in Baarlo. There are still open questions, but we must keep working on them together in the ecumenical movement. And we face great challenges which we intend to tackle on the joint Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, where we can supplement and challenge one another," she stated.

Hamburg/Schöffengrund, 26 May 2014

More on **Church and Peace** at: www.church-and-peace.org

Church and Peace is a European ecumenical network made up of congregations, communities, organisations and individuals with strong membership from the historical Peace Churches. Members are committed to active witness for peace and share the conviction that the vocation of the Church is to be a witness to God's peace. The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are at the core of their vision. Church and Peace works together with national and international networks: Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF, Germany); Conference of European Churches; World Council of Churches; Network of Christian Peace Organisations (NCPO, UK); International Network for a Culture of Nonviolence and Peace.