

**Church and Peace International Conference  
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**"The fruit of righteousness will be peace" (Is 32:17) -  
Living together at the heart of Europe**

Leonardo Emberti Gialloreti, Community of Sant'Egidio, Rome

I greet you all with affection. I am impressed and grateful by your choice to come together here in Prishtina. As a Christian - and as a European - I am thankful to "Church and Peace" for its commitment to peace and for having been for so many years a forum of dialogue. I am well aware of the long history before and after the founding of "Church and Peace", in 1978. Maybe people in Europe have not always noticed it, but "Church and Peace" has moved the consciences of churches and of individuals. "Church and Peace", throughout the years, has not been a visible tsunami; it has rather been an underground river, which, year after year, day after day, visit after visit, has eroded in all the churches the acceptance and justifications of wars, while offering ways of peace. Yours has been a meek and prophetic voice. You see, tsunamis destroy, underground rivers make life possible. Along your path you have clarified that peace is something much too serious to make it the affair of a few, or to leave it only to politicians. As John Paul II once said: "Peace is a workshop, open to all and not just to specialists, savants and strategists".

I am therefore thankful to have been invited to take part in this Meeting, which is a sign of our shared desire for peace. I am thankful, because you gave me the occasion to come back to Prishtina after seventeen years. The last time I was here, was shortly before the war, when we met with Mr. Rugova, to accompany him to Italy.

I am also thankful, because your presence here today is a strong message for Europe. The message that dialogue is something that everyone seeks and strives for. We - together - believe that dialogue is crucial to build a true civilization in today's globalized world.

But, let me ask you: Do we really believe that dialogue is the way for a future without wars? Or is this only a childish dream?

Actually, we have to admit: In our world of today, it is not easy to live together for people who are different from each other. We see it every day: The difficulty of living together arises in many places of the world, causing often great suffering.

After World War II, where tens of millions people had been killed, humankind finally - albeit belatedly - understood that all human beings are equal. This belief was proclaimed by the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". But - we ask ourselves - if human beings are equal, why is it so hard to live together? Human beings are proclaimed equal, yet they feel different. This proclaimed equality actually sounds more like an abstraction. Human beings are different, in terms of ethnic or economic background, language, or religion. At the bottom of their identity there seems to be a destiny inscribed: The difficulty - sometimes the impossibility - to live together.

Some of you - as we are here in Prishtina - might believe that when speaking about the difficulty of living together, I am referring to the history of Kosova or of former Yugoslavia. Yes, but not only.

Living together among peoples who are different - alas - is not a problem limited to these beautiful lands. It is a global challenge, a universal issue. In many corners of the world, violence has taken hold of hearts and minds; it has produced tragedies among people who felt irremediably different, perceiving the others as a threat. In these instances, coexistence has turned into hell. How is living together possible after the tragedies we have experienced? Some years ago, in leaving the Memorial of the massacres in Rwanda, I felt this question rise within me: "How will these people live together after what has happened?"

Let us stop some moments on the Balkans. For many centuries, the Balkans were places of coexistence among Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, and Jews. They lived together. For centuries, during the Ottoman Empire, Slavs, Greeks, Albanians, were overlapping. I think of the Shkodra Region and Montenegro, the Adriatic coast to Kotor, Kosova and beyond to Niš, in Uskub/Skopje, and western Macedonia to Epirus. Minorities, such as Vlachs, Roma, or Jews, mingled with those from greater critical mass. Often they became assimilated into the language, customs, even identity. In Kosova, until the midst of the nineteenth century, there was no conflict: Albanians and Slavs identified themselves more as Muslims or Christians, and not so much with an ethnicity. Confessional differences did not lead to religious conflicts, to breaks of cohabitation. Mixed marriages were quite common (we see until today the beautiful results of these mixed marriages!). Different groups lived in mutual respect.

Regrettably, the advent of nations and nationalisms led to another story. Each nation aimed to carve out more space possible at the expense of its neighbors. In this context, Albanians were the weakest. In the mid of the nineteenth century Greeks, Serbs and Montenegrins had already their own states. Albanians will have a state only in 1912 (in the same period, the great powers handed Kosova over to Serbia). Even in 1940, Albanians were just a million and a half in the whole Balkans. A small people. They were so weak that a project to transfer all the Kosova Albanians to Turkey was signed in Belgrade and Ankara. The project did not work and failed only because of the outbreak of World War II. Looking at these developments, to talk about living together was not easy. Everyone was supposed to defend himself. The Balkan wars have taken place for almost two centuries, until today. All Balkan peoples, some more than others, sooner or later, absorbed their share of nationalism. Became nationalists. But, please, we should never forget that nationalism did not rise up in the Balkans. It rose up in France, in Germany, in England.

The history of the Balkans shows us that diversity, on the one hand, constitutes a great resource, which has contributed to the social, cultural and spiritual development of this region; while, on the other hand, diversity has also been the cause of painful rifts and bloody wars.

We are well aware that the communities of Kosova do not agree on the interpretations of the sorrowful past and recent events of tensions and fighting. We must be honest. Memories are different. The way in which two peoples look at their history is different, often opposite. But, I would like here to stress that even if memories are different, these memories are all associated with sorrow. All have suffered. We could discuss for hours who has suffered more. But, all have suffered. Sorrow is engraved in the hearts and minds of many elderly people and adults. The sorrow of all mothers is the same: It should unite different memories. In this region, memories can widely differ, but all have gone through deep deep suffering.

Here in Prishtina we understand better that living together requires great efforts and hard work. This is an issue not only in the Balkans, but throughout whole Europe, throughout the world. We see it again in these very days: Diversity often leads to divorces, to walls, to the exoduses of populations.

Even little differences can lead to violence: War has returned to Europe, between Russia and Ukraine, two peoples whose differences are very little.

If we enlarge our horizons over Europe, we see that in the last two years the whole structure of the Middle East has failed, while persecuted refugees flee from the area: Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lybia; a list that will broaden in the next years.

Let me stop a moment on Syria. Syria is prey to a devastating and inhuman war. For more than four years Syria has died every day under the blows of a horrible war, which has now lasted longer than World War I (Aylan, the 3-year-old Kurdish child who died in the Mediterranean, during his short life didn't see nothing else than war). Today, peace for Syria seems impossible. The failure - this is the right word - of the international community is plain. However - I question myself - is there anywhere a movement for peace in Syria? Is there, anywhere in the Arab countries? Anywhere in Europe? Anywhere in the Mediterranean? The passion for peace seems to have worn out. Some of you will remember it: In 2003 we witnessed a powerful movement for peace against the war in Iraq, a sister country of Syria. Today there is no concern, no protest, no invocation for peace. But, giving-up on peace means to condemn Syria to death.

Can we accept to give-up on peace and to resign to war? Can we accept pulling back into our small worlds of peace, in a sheltered corner, in the problems of my own country? Can we accept to build barbed wires to protect our little tranquillity?

War, the culture of war - if we want it or not - besieges each one of us, at least through the refugees. Like those refugees who reach Europe, suffering, without knowing where to go and with no chance of returning to live in their countries. Only a restored peace in Syria and in Iraq will make them stay in their land. Syrians, like other refugees due to war or to environmental disasters- like in Bangladesh - leave their homelands. Who has the right to stop them? Fences will not stop the refugees, they will search for weak points at frontiers and burst through them. The flows of migrants demands serious interventions at all stage. From working for a ceasefire in Syria to helping Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraqi Kurdistan to deal with their vastly larger number of refugees (Lebanon, population of 4million: 1million refugees; Kurdistan, population of 5million: 1.5 million refugees).

Throughout history, Central European countries - like Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, or Poland - have benefited mightily from migration and the charity of others. The second world war, the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, as well as Poland's tormented 20<sup>th</sup> century, all have produced waves of refugees. None of these hundreds of thousands of refugees has been refused or sent back. All these countries saw, 25 years ago, the communist walls being broken down. We remember the scrapping of an Hungarian fence on the frontier with Austria in May 1989. We still have in our eyes the joy of those who regained their freedom of movement by climbing over the walls, which had been pulled down. How is it possible that these same countries have so quickly forgotten history and re-began to build walls? Probably, there is the idea that those who are arriving today do not belong to the same mankind!

Somebody even says that letting the refugees enter Europe will destroy the Christian values of our countries. I believe exactly the opposite: A country, which refuses to accept even small numbers of refugees, is a country that has already lost its Christian values!

I'm beginning here to speak about religion: Unfortunately, at the dawn of this century dangerous cocktails between religions and violence have been created. This happened especially after September 11, 2001, when an interpretation of conflicts as wars of religions and civilizations took root. It was a tremendous simplification facing the complexity of the global world, but it was handy for whoever was seeking an enemy and

did not want to make the effort of understanding the other. Wars of religion? Frightened men and women were reassured in finding an enemy to fight. Power-thirsty men and women seek a blessing and legitimization in religion. We should be aware that no religion is designed to be violent. However, in the same way, no religion is always and forever peaceful (that is why we need "Church and Peace"! ). Each religion has the responsibility to rediscover every day that peace is not a banal or generic word: It is a word strongly connected to God himself. Religions know, and should never forget, that peace is the yearning of the people, as well as a gift of God. The Latin origin of the word "religion" (religio) means bond, connection, attachment. Religions should never forget that they are called to bind people; not to divide people.

Religions should help everyone not to say: 'It is someone else's problem'. Yes, we are different, but bound to each other. Great men and women of the spirit have always taught that where a synagogue burns, sooner or later a church or a mosque will burn; and, with them, also democracy and culture will burn. Never destroy the temple of another. On Crystal Night in 1938, the parish priest of the (Catholic) Cathedral of Berlin, Bernhard Lichtenberg, preached in these terms: "Out there a synagogue is burning: It is the house of God".

When we speak about wars, we should not forget also the widespread violence, which gnaws entire cities, especially in the suburbs, where the violence of mafias and crime rules - like for example in Mexico, in El Salvador, or in South Africa - educating the youth to the worship of violence, to the idolatry of power and money. These are almost civil wars. The State does not protect its citizens, who end up in the violent hands of criminal or pseudo-religious groups.

And I don't mention here the unrestrained and unquestioned consumption of creation. This is the typical attitude of people who have forgotten that also other people exist and will exist. It is the insane plan of a world without the others.

As I have briefly outlined here, our today's world is full of sorrowful stories, which germinate from the re-legitimization of war as a tool. Sorrowful stories, which give rise to a general feeling of hopelessness in the face of war. Wars are increasingly inhuman. We see it in the exhibition of acts of cruelty, which - in the past - used to be covered up by those who committed them, and now, in this global era, are used as a weapon: To slaughter and to exhibit the horror. These are acts of worship of violence that terrorizes and conquers. Today there is something that concerns us: The widespread attitude of acceptance of a history of violence, terrorism, war. As if they were unstoppable trends. As if peace was a lost utopia of the past century.

What then? All is lost? Did I come here to make you depressed, presenting you with a bleak outlook?

It is true, 70 years after the nuclear massacre and the end of World War II, humanity seems to have forgotten that war is an adventure with no turning back. Indeed, wars seem to have become normal and many people are again attracted by the dreadful appeal of violence. The power of evil today strikes against millions of children, women, elderly people, families; it generates fighters, imprisoned by an insane and violent mindset. Tens of millions of refugees are crowding over Asia, on the borders of Europe, and in other areas of the world. In these moments the words of Isaiah: "The fruit of righteousness will be peace" seem no more than a wish. Peace is not the reality today. Neither does it seem to be the future.

But, if we look more in depth, these first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are full of signs of hope.

Let us think, for example, of what we have recently seen. Many European people, in spite of their fears, have shown a welcoming face to refugees. You have seen how peoples in different European countries unblocked and approached refugees, in spite of walls and populist protests. Many Europeans, free from the block of fear, approached people they did not know with friendliness, people who had been presented to them as invaders.

Too eagerly we accept the idea that there is no positive energy in the heart of peoples. We must bring these positive energies to light, as they are a deep and hidden strength. It is necessary to bring to light the desire for peace and good that exists in people, also here in Kosova: Pleading, asking, protesting, advocating, invoking is not useless, for peace is always possible. A shared hope for peace among people, in the face of the failure of politics, is a great resource. Building peace is indeed a difficult endeavour, slow, realistic, but it is also a dream that can open many routes.

This means that peace must be sought as the future of our countries, of conflict areas, of situations of tension. Each and every person, beyond the borders of his or her community, is called to be a woman and man of peace. This demands the development of a passion for peace, intended as a powerful resource, capable of spurring new ideas, of restoring places of encounter, of defying the fates of war. This is the time in which peace should become again a passion, not a profession.

Speaking particularly about the young generations, often people say that they do not have ideals. I do not believe that. May be they are less inclined to ideologies than in the past. This could be something positive. But, when meeting with young people, I see a strong desire for peace. Peace: This can be the great ideal of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which could set whole generations in motion. The last century has witnessed tremendous advances in technology and in human rights. But, it was also the century of excitement for violence and wars. This century can be the century of excitement for peace. A great ideal, which can shape the life and the future of entire generations!

During the 20th century, violence, war has fascinated whole generations. But the projects to build mono-ethnic or mono-religious societies through violence have all failed. We cannot stop history. The future will make us geographically closer. Different people will be mixing more and more with each other. Frontiers will not stop the movements of history, accelerated in this era of globalization: Different peoples grow closer and start living together. No wall will be able to stop this. Emigration is proof to this movement of approach, which has created in Europe (and not only) unprecedented stories of coexistence, unthought-of neighbourhood relations. Human beings, driven by necessity and by history, will live close to one another.

Are these coexistences dangerous then? Are they destined to tragic divorces or permanent conflict? On the contrary, I firmly believe that, notwithstanding the difficulties, living together will become a destiny of peace. We need to prepare to be close spiritually, because we are so different, yet so similar. If one does so, living together in peace will be the future. The 21<sup>st</sup> century: Can't it be the century of the fascination of living together in peace?

I mentioned before, the solidarity that many Europeans have shown towards refugees arriving from Syria, and not only. Our continent, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will become again a land of immigration. We may like it or not. Everything concurs to that: The self-destructive ageing of the European populations imposes us to accept migrants (and the countries, which are closing their borders, are among those whose aging is fastest). Our social model gives us the possibility to accept migrants. The demographic explosion of Africa, together with global warming, will require more and more to accept migrants. All

these issues are well known. What is, may be, less known, is that Europe, before the economical crisis of 2007 was, in terms of immigration, the most open region in the world, even if not many people noticed it. But, the crisis, which began in the US and then spread to Europe, led to a brutal closure of the borders, led to an increase in unemployment and xenophobia.

Let us take a step back. In 2015 the European Union has 510 million inhabitants; the inhabitants were 485 million in 1995. An increase of 25 million people in twenty years is nothing exceptional. It is only a 0.2% increase per year, compared to a 1.2% increase at world level. But, the main point is that three quarters of this increase was due to immigration. Before 2007, Europe welcomed about 1 million immigrants per year, in a time in which - hear ye, hear ye! - unemployment was continuing to go down. But, after 2007, only 400.000 immigrants per year were accepted in whole Europe.

I believe that the tragedy of the refugees of today could be the occasion for the Europeans to get out of their petite and pusillanimous diatribes and egocentrism. Opening up to the world, and re-beginning to welcome migrants, as we did before 2007, is the only way to kick-start our economies and investments, and to drive back the deflationary risks. The openness recently shown by Germany towards immigrants is good news for the suffering people, but it is good news also for Germany. Without immigration the German population will decrease, by the end of the century, from the 81 million of today, to 63 million. I believe that this intelligent choice of Germany should be a lesson to some former communist countries of Europe - like Hungary or the Czech Republic - who are refusing to accept even small numbers of refugees. These countries don't like immigrants, but, in fact, they also don't like children: Yes, they are among the countries with the lowest birth rates in Europe! If they don't come back to their senses, in the next 80 years the population of all these countries will have moved from 95 million to 55 million! And many millions will be old people. It will be unsustainable for a country. You see, welcoming immigrants is not only human, it is wise. "Be simple with intelligence!" - used to teach the great John Chrysostom.

Living together helps each country, and helps everybody of us, to become a better person. Coming together from different paths, beginning to live together, even if you are different, is always an occasion to move in a less egocentric fashion; living together is a way to become more capable of grasping the complexity of life and of the world. Egocentrism is not only a problem of each one of us (and each one of us has to fight against his/her own egocentrism). Not only individuals, but whole nations or ethnic groups can have an egocentric approach to reality, when they refuse to look at the existence of the others. The real opposite of peace is not war; it is egocentrism: Personal, ethnical, or collective egocentrism. Egocentrism can easily lead to contempt and to violence towards the others. The Gospel is very clear on that (Mt 5, 21-22): "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca (an Aramaic term for contempt) is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." For the Gospel it is very clear: Contempt leads to all forms of violence.

An Islamic mystic, Jalal al Din Rumi, wrote: "The first struggle is with oneself, purifying one's nature. Begin with yourself". And a wise Jew, Martin Buber, taught: "The Archimedean point from which I can raise the world is the changing of my own self".

Men and women, who change themselves, change the world and establish peace. This is what is needed in our daily lives, as well as in politics. Seeking peace for us alone, protected by barbed wires, is not only unjust, it is simply impossible. Peace is possible only if it is sought for the others, not only for me. Bringing peace to the others will bring

peace also to me. I do not say this as a dreamer (though dreams have their strength) but as part of a Community, which has worked as peacemaker in concrete ways. Achieving successes, like in Mozambique, or struggling and with limited results, in other situations, like here in Kosova. But, even facing failures, we always continued to believe that peace is possible. Peace must be possible always, just as the hope to live, to be happy, to have a dignified life.

Each one of us - each one of you, part of this network of "Church and Peace" - holds a crucial responsibility. In our world, frightened by the economic crisis, an inspiration is necessary to bring back hope, and to guide humankind towards the awareness of a common destiny. We should remind everybody that women and men actually undertake one same journey, and that they share a common fate. It is a basic consciousness, as simple as bread and as wanted as water: People share a common destiny in diversity, "all relatives, all different" - in the words of the anthropologist Germaine Tillion, who was imprisoned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. This basic awareness is sometimes lost in the tangle of hatred, vested interests, perversion of culture, fanaticism. We need to revive the workshops of unity, especially by encouraging a simple, essential, uniting drive. "Be simple with intelligence!".

Our 21st Century is at a crossroads: Between hopelessness and a future of hope, between indifference and solidarity. We need to open up the doors of our hearts, of our countries, because there are no walls or barbed wires that can stop a person's need to live and guarantee a future to his or her children.

Dialogue, dialogue, and again dialogue. This is the right solution in order to live together in regions and cities that are more and more complex and multifaceted, both from an ethnic and religious perspective. Dialogue is a daily practice, a culture, which turns into a proposal.

Wars leave the world worse than they found it. If we look back to the past two decades, we see that the wars of the new global world left a poisoned heritage of instability, destruction, mines, hatred, uprooted peoples. I say this not out of pacifism, but by a sound historical awareness of what has happened. Refusal of war does not originate from generic pacifism, but from the will to be peacemakers, emphasizing the path of dialogue. Being peacemakers is much more than being pacifists. Pacifists ask other people to change (and that is good), but a peacemaker asks also him/herself to change. A peacemaker is a person who deeply understands that he or she is the first one who needs to change. It is her or his change that will then transform the world.

So, to each human being we say: Let us help the world find a human response to war, to migrations, to the environmental crisis, to the numerous forms of poverty, and to the quest for meaning of many people.

To the rulers of this world we say: War is not overcome by war. It is a fraud! War always gets out of hand. Do not be deceived! War makes entire peoples inhuman. Let us start afresh from dialogue, which is a unique art, an irreplaceable medicine that brings reconciliation among peoples.

We are all aware that there is a long way yet to go. Let us not be discouraged, however, by the difficulties, but rather continue with perseverance along the way of forgiveness and reconciliation. While we seek to recall the past with honesty, thereby learning the lessons of history, we must also learn to avoid lamentation and recrimination.

From these days here, a challenge rises: May a new movement of hearts and minds, of willingness for peace be born, be born again! Indeed a new peace movement! This quest originates from the depths of our hearts. It stems from disgust for war, from the cry of the suffering. A peace movement that does not lose hope when faced with war and pain. As tenacious as a tireless prayer, as tenacious as an endless dream.

As Patriarch Athenagoras, who had been through the World War in the Balkans, said, I quote: "I have met the Slavs. I have observed the Germans and the Austrians. I have lived... with the French. All peoples are good. Each deserves respect and admiration. I have seen men and women suffer. They all need love. If they are evil, it is because they have never met true love... I also know there are darker, demonic forces, which sometimes seize men and peoples... But the love of God is stronger than hell".

With this strong conviction and great hope, we can look at even the darkest and most warmongering horizons. Peace is always possible. We have to seek it. Fearlessly.