



Church and Peace

International Office

Church and Peace is an ecumenical network of Christian communities, churches and organisations in Europe committed to the peace church vision.

Press release

Church and Peace's Administrative Committee meeting November 2-4, 2011 Mennonite congregation Weierhof

Struggle for God's Shalom to Continue, Even after the End of the ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence

After Kingston, churches must find answers to the question of the international Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

'We continue to struggle with how innocent people can be protected from injustice, war and violence. In this light, we struggle with the concept of the "responsibility to protect" and its possible misuse. We urgently request that the World Council of Churches (WCC) and related bodies further clarify their positions regarding this policy,' said the delegates from churches all over the world in Kingston, Jamaica at the end of the 'Decade to Overcome Violence' in May.

This appeal in the final message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) and also its consequences were a central theme of Church and Peace's Administrative Committee meeting held from November 2-4, 2011 at the Mennonite congregation Weierhof. The meeting began with participation in ecumenical prayers for peace which opened the Kirchheimbolanden Peace Days.

The challenge Church and Peace presented to the delegates in Kingston: The first draft of the final IEPC message included responsibility to protect (R2P) as part of the concept of Just Peace. R2P does not exclude using military force to protect threatened population groups. The Church and Peace General Assembly met in France concurrently to the IEPC and were deeply concerned over R2P. In their message to the IEPC delegates, they reiterated what the historic peace churches testified to: 'We reject the idea that Just Peace forces us into a dilemma between the call to nonviolence and the lawful use of force to protect endangered peoples.'

Rev. Janna Postma, a member of the Administrative Committee and also a delegate in Jamaica, described the intense discussion process in which delegates from worldwide historic peace churches and from Church and Peace (especially the other Church and Peace representative, Kees Nieuwerth) argued clearly against the theological acceptability of the use of military means under the international R2P. The Administrative Committee welcomed this important appeal cited in the first paragraph.

A response from the churches is now expected: that the concept of 'responsibility to protect' and therefore the legitimacy of military force is now under discussion, is a great opportunity and obligation in the eyes of the Administrative Committee members who hail from the Netherlands, England, Switzerland, Serbia and Germany.

'The dialogue, in which we struggle together on the path of nonviolence in Jesus' footsteps, must now continue - through theological work, through policy analysis and by being living examples of what we stand for. The WCC General Assembly in Busan, South Korea in 2013 should clearly answer the question as to whether the churches stand for violence,' declared the Administrative Committee.

The Administrative Committee of Church and Peace urges the churches to seize this challenge and initiate a process of clarification. The churches must lead in providing answers to questions on the concept of R2P.

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Background: In 2005, the United Nations adopted the concept of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P). It identifies the measures by which the international community responds to genocide, ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity but also legitimises the move to military action. In 2006 the WCC at its General Assembly in Porto Alegre supported this international standard in a declaration on the protection of vulnerable populations.

Church and Peace has dealt critically with R2P. In regard to the UN-concept and the 2006 WCC statement, the 2009 Church and Peace General Assembly rejected the part that allows for the use of military force. It notes that the path of nonviolence in the footsteps of Jesus does not allow for force as a last resort. At the same time it refers to the fact that any military option necessarily lead to a neglect of non-military means, and the primacy of the military leads.

With regard to the NATO mission in Libya, the Administrative Committee emphasised this opinion again in March 2011. The message to the IEPC delegates says: 'The churches must reorient their political strategies: pleading for strengthened commitment to nonviolent intervention organised by the international community, inspired by models like Christian Peacemaker Teams and Peace Brigades International. We call on the churches to increase their own involvement in peace services wherever there is conflict and social disruption. Violence in any form can never serve to bring about lasting peace with justice. We invite you to resist together with us the temptation of justifying the use of deadly weapons even as a last resort. Let us walk together on the path to peace.'

The declarations of Church and Peace can be downloaded from
<http://www.church-and-peace.org/declarations.html>

Church and Peace is a European Ecumenical peace church network made up of communities, training centres, peace organizations and peace service agencies. Their common conviction is that the peace witness and nonviolence of the Gospel are essential characteristics of the Church and lead to nonviolent service for peace and reconciliation. Church and Peace is an associate member of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), a partner in the Assisi Coalition, a member of Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF), and a member of the Network of Christian Peace Organizations (UK).