



Church and Peace

International Office

***Church and Peace* is an ecumenical Peace Church network
made up of communities, training centres,
peace organisations and peace-service agencies in Europe.**

The people in Kosovo need more encounters and better prospects!

“The fruit of righteousness will be peace” (Is 32:17) - living together at the heart of Europe. With this theme about 90 people from 13 European countries met in Kosovo from 7 to 11 October for the international conference of Church and Peace. The invitation came from the International Protestant Evangelical Church ‘Fellowship of the Lord’s People’ in Pristina. The worldwide ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace led Christians from the European peace churches, initiatives and communities to the heart of Europe, to points of pain and places of hope. A pilgrimage from Budapest to Pristina went backwards along the route of the refugees who are travelling via Serbia to northern Europe.

A day trip through Kosovo showed the cultural and scenic beauties of the country, but also the consequences of the war of 1999 and the riots of 2004. It became clear that there is an urgent need for assistance with reconstruction. Singing and praying for reconciliation and peace on the site of the Battle of Kosovo (1389), the historical starting point for tensions and violent clashes lasting into the recent past; a ‘Dona Nobis Pacem’ together with a monk and an imam in the Serbian Orthodox monastery of Decani, which is guarded by KFOR troops; a warm welcome in a mosque and in the neighbouring episcopal church in Prizren – these were further way-stations on this route.

In view of the large percentage of young people and the depressingly high unemployment, not to speak of the hopeless situation of ethnic minorities such as the Roma, it offered a sign of hope to meet with the staff of social service and inter-ethnic projects. Children from Roma families are supported beyond their basic necessities, e.g. they are given assistance with their homework. That is a way of reaching their mothers as well and breaking the generation-long chain of insufficient schooling.

“The war was long and planned with a lot of money,” said a Kosovar we talked to. “The work of reconciliation and reconstruction is supposed to take only a few years, but that can only fail.” It is therefore irresponsible if European institutions stop supporting projects too soon. The reconstruction of society is being torpedoed by corruption at all levels. Young people, in particular, expressed disappointment about the lack of assertiveness and solidarity of European countries. They felt excluded by being refused visas to travel. Young people who have no prospects become vulnerable for religious and ethnic fanaticism.

It was therefore particularly important to pray together, relax, tell stories, listen to one another, discuss, practise non-violent action with the members of the small Protestant church, particularly with the many young people. We were impressed to hear reports of their action at the Pristina bus station, where they approached those getting on board to leave the country and held up banners with the words: ‘There is hope for Kosova - don’t leave!’

“The real opposite of peace is not war; it is egocentrism – personal, ethnic or collective egocentrism,” stated Leonardo Emberti Gialloreti from the Community of Sant’Egidio, Rome, in his keynote presentation. In fact, the refugee tragedy in Europe today is also an opportunity to find ways out of this egocentrism, in his view.

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“No one is ever prepared in their life to become a refugee,” said a Bosnian imam, who from his own experience made clear how in situations of total insecurity people fall into ways of behaving that do not match the picture of the grateful, peaceful refugee.

In one of the workshops women from Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia came to the moving realisation that their grandmothers, mothers and they themselves had had the same experiences in struggling for their own survival and that of their communities. They therefore had to engage with the same emotional and structural issues.

At a public event hosted by Church and Peace, Ulrike Lunacek, vice-president of the European Parliament and standing rapporteur on Kosovo spoke through a video message. She sent a powerful appeal to all religions to use their potential for peace. At the same event, representatives of the religious communities in Kosovo underlined the common challenge of rebuilding the bridges of tolerance and trust that had been destroyed in the war.

“The people of Kosovo need more encounters and better prospects,” declared Antje Heider-Rottwilm, chair of Church and Peace. “Only that way will people in western Europe change their ideas about this many-faceted and fascinating region - and only then can people in Kosovo contribute their cultural and ethnic wealth to a Europe that is growing ever closer together.”

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Contact:

- International Office of Church and Peace: +49 6445 5588
- Antje Heider-Rottwilm: +49 172 5162 799

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 works together with national and international networks: Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF, Germany), Conference of European Churches (CEC), World Council of Churches, Network of Christian Peace Organizations (NCPO, UK), International Network for a Culture of Nonviolence and Peace.