

# Church and Peace – Ecumenical, International and European Perspectives

*presented by Antje Heider-Rottwilm*

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## I. The Network: Church and Peace

May 1945. Europe lies in ruins. Tens of millions have been killed. Many millions more have endured unimaginable suffering and are now fighting to survive. The vast majority of churches and Christians on both sides have supported the decisions and actions of their governments which have caused this horrific suffering. The origins of Church and Peace can be traced to the questions, especially of young women and men, of the post-war era. Questions such as:

- Why could the churches not prevent two world wars?
- Why have they accepted war and even tried to justify it?
- Shouldn't the churches be offering a different option, a way of peace?

At its first Assembly in Amsterdam 1948, 70 years ago, the World Council of Churches (WCC) also struggled with these questions. Its member churches were urged to take a critical look at their theology of war and peace. The WCC asked the Historic Peace Churches to take an active part in this discussion. In response, the Historic Peace Churches organised various theological consultations. These meetings brought together European Mennonites and Quakers as well as representatives of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Historic Peace Churches in North America. At the heart of their discussion was the question: what does it mean to be a peace church?

These theological conferences had two aims:

- firstly, to highlight the incompatibility between being a disciple of Jesus and going to war, and
- secondly to promote the formation of a European network of individuals and groups sharing the Christian pacifist conviction.

It was evident that theological discussion alone would not suffice; these convictions should also be put into action. For this reason the international Christian peace service agency Eirene was formed in 1957. Its purpose was to offer young Christians the possibility of doing long-term voluntary peace service.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s different groups continued the process of theological discussion and a broader ecumenical dialogue began. These groups focused on two central issues:

- the role played by Christian pacifism in the churches and
- the process by which a church could become a peace church.

The first visits and meetings took place in 1975 and led to the founding of Church and Peace in 1978 as an association. Since that time Church and Peace has evolved to be an international and inter-confessional meeting place for persons from communities, churches and peace organisations who wish to continually renew their commitment to living as members of a peace church.

The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount are at the core of Church and Peace's vision. The network's overarching commitment to active Gospel nonviolence finds expression in various forms of peace church community, taking inspiration in particular from the Early Church, the Anabaptist movement and the Historic Peace Churches.

Today Church and Peace comprises approximately 100 individual and corporate members in Western, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. It has its office in Germany which consists of three half-time staff persons. And the Church and Peace network is alive and growing.

The urgency of the task to overcome violence is as apparent today as ever. The churches are challenged anew to respond to their calling to live as the peace church of Jesus and to put his teachings into action.

## II. Living Nonviolence

Members of Church and Peace are longstanding peace organisations such as Eirene which has sent thousands of young and old people in crisis regions or projects all around the world, as well as young initiatives like Youth for Christ in Croatia or Bread of Life, a Christian humanitarian organization founded in 1992 as a local non-governmental organization, by the Protestant Evangelical church and the Baptist church in Belgrade. Bread of Life was created as Christian response to the most critical needs of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija and vulnerable local population.

Several members of Church and Peace are spiritual convents or communities of people living together in a simple, spiritual lifestyle, committed to justice, peace and integrity of creation – as la Communauté de l'Arche or Pomeyrol in France, the Christusbruderschaft Selbitz, Bread and Roses, a group of people in Hamburg living together with refugees in the tradition of the Catholic workers.<sup>1</sup>

In 2015 we had our yearly international conference at the place of a 'young' member at Pristina in Kosova, a region with a longstanding and ongoing sensitive history of war and difficult relationships inside and outside the region, between religions, ethnicities. I read out of our press release:

““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.

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.

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 international 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. (...)

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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1 <https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/network/members/links>

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, 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.”<sup>2</sup>

Our Conferences are the place to share experiences and competencies of living nonviolence and to grow together in faith and hope. The themes range from theological reflection on the link between language and politics, or promoting the shift to a just peace concept at the institutional level of the Church, to involvement in inter-religious dialogue and support for Christian-Muslim peace building. Members share their efforts to welcome refugees, challenge racism and exclusion, prevent extremism and end the ever-increasing arms trade that feeds the violence forcing people to seek refuge in other countries.

Workshops offer the chance to share experiences such as during our last conference: teaching the art of peace to children; de-escalation and dialogue in the midst of armed conflict in the Ukraine; just peace in the marketplace; embodied prayer, contemplation and action for peace and reconciliation; Christian hope versus nuclear ‘deterrence’; providing sanctuary in Europe; the language of biblical nonviolence and just peace for advocacy for peace; and multiple identities.

There are the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship’s efforts to put forward nonviolent alternatives, in particular advocating for the churches to urge the UK government to sign the UN nuclear weapons ban treaty. Or the Friends House Moscow funds projects for peace and civil society in the former Soviet Union. They support projects in a variety of areas including human rights, education, restorative justice, and nonviolent communication. Each project also furthers social goals such as grass-roots collaboration, equality and nonviolence.

“Re:Action – Believers for Peace in Times of Nationalism and Xenophobia” was the theme of a conference which was held at the beginning of April 2017 near Zagreb, Croatia, with more than 70 participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, and guests from Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, and the USA. Muslims and Christians, including imams, Serbian Orthodox priests, members of religious orders, and pastors of various denominations, took part. The conference was organised by Church and Peace and RAND, a partner organisation of Church and Peace in the region.

It ended after intensive discussions, prayers, and times of silence with a declaration:

“...We, participants of the conference “Re:Action - Believers for Peace in Times of Nationalism and Xenophobia” firstly want to declare to each other and to the public that we are convinced that any justification of xenophobia and nationalism by faith arguments or religious traditions is profoundly wrong and unacceptable.

Peacebuilding, on the basis of equal rights and the worth of each individual, requires a constant search for freedom and justice, which are the main messages of the Holy Scriptures in all our religions. Our faith communities and churches deny the validity of any national supremacy and hatred towards people of other identity groups and repudiates provoking fear from other and different people.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Press\\_release\\_Church\\_and\\_Peace\\_Pristina.pdf](https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Press_release_Church_and_Peace_Pristina.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Press\\_release\\_Church\\_and\\_Peace\\_Pristina.pdf](https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Press_release_Church_and_Peace_Pristina.pdf)

After our Church and Peace conference near Paris 2016 we gathered at the Eurosatory, the world's largest international defence and security exhibition. Through nonviolent witness at the Paris Bourse and the entrance to Eurosatory, members of the Church and Peace network were able to speak with many passers-by and people coming to check out the latest in weapons technology, producers, politicians and militaries, about logic of peace and security through nonviolence.

### III. Ecumenical cooperation

As I said in the beginning, there is a longstanding relationship with the WCC. Apart from the common ecumenical and political themes there is a range of Church and Peace members who are as well members of the WCC. The same is with the CEC, the Conference of European Churches (CEC), which was founded in 1959 to promote reconciliation, dialogue and friendship between the churches of Europe at a time of growing Cold War political tensions and divisions. CEC is a fellowship of some 116 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 National Council of Churches and Organisations in Partnership. The CEC has offices in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Together with the Catholic Bishop Conferences in Europe, CEC developed together with its member churches the "Charta Oecumenica - Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe", which was spread out in 2001 and includes a strong ecumenical statement and 27 concrete commitments regarding theological growing together and common responsibility for Europe and a just world.<sup>4</sup>

Members of Church and Peace are involved in conferences and working groups of both ecumenical bodies – and Church and Peace is Association in Partnership to CEC, which included during the last four years an intensive commitment in the Thematic Reference Groups for Peace and Reconciliation, the group for Economic Justice and the moderatorship of the Public Issues Committee at the CEC Assembly in June 2018 at Novi Sad.<sup>5</sup>

As Church and Peace we joined the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence and the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace launched by the WCC. "Meeting under the theme of Psalm 85:10 "Justice and Peace shall embrace", our international conference on 21-24 June 2018 in Hoddesdon, UK, took participants further on the ecumenical journey from 'just war' to 'just peace'. The gathering assembled 93 ecumenical pilgrims from Albania to Ireland, from France to Russia, with the aim of "journeying together for reconciliation in a fractured Europe". (...) Keynote speaker and Methodist minister the Revd Inderjit Bhogal traced his own pilgrimage of justice and peace from his origins in the Punjab through Kenya to the UK, where he has worked tirelessly for justice and to build cultures of welcome through the City of Sanctuary movement.

He noted that the most crucial issue facing society today was one that ran throughout the whole Bible, one of journeying and movement – migration. 'How we relate (...) in particular to people seeking sanctuary and safety (...) will be the measure by which we shall judge personal, national and international morality and spirituality.' Referencing Jonathan Sacks, he underlined that the churches must develop a 'theology of the sacredness of the other'.

Bhogal noted the close link between violence, unjust peace and forced journeying. Migration was driven overwhelmingly by conflict, and poverty caused in large part by the investment of resources in war was the biggest killer, he said. Both the theology and practice of nonviolence were needed, rooted firmly in a commitment to 'learn war no more'.<sup>6</sup>

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4 <http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ChartaOecumenica.pdf>

5 [https://assembly2018.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GEN\\_PUB\\_01\\_Public\\_Committee\\_Draft\\_Report\\_APPROVED\\_EN.pdf](https://assembly2018.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GEN_PUB_01_Public_Committee_Draft_Report_APPROVED_EN.pdf)

6 <https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/church-and-peace-calls-churches-to-nonviolence-on-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace/>

#### IV. Advocacy on European politics

Being a European Peace Network means to analyse and intervene in European social and political developments. As network we raise our voice and together we have a stronger voice than each on their own.

- We raise our voice towards developments in the European Union, in the whole of Europe, and towards the European institutions.
- We raise our voice in our own countries, pointing to our common experiences and interventions as a network from all over Europe.
- And we turn to the churches, challenging them to be even more clear in struggling for just peace in all its dimensions.

Looking at Europe, I focus on some aspects of European Union politics.

**July 2016:** The European Commission unveiled a new Foreign and Security Policy. She called for a “stronger Europe” in the face of current crises. “As Europeans we must take greater responsibility for our **security**. We must be ready and able to deter, respond to, and protect ourselves against external threats,” the document<sup>7</sup> stated.

**In June 2017** the European Council published conclusions on security and defence, concentrating on three aspects challenging the security of European citizens:

- Internal security and the fight against terrorism
- External security and defence – which means protecting borders against refugees and
- strong military capacities against Russia

The Commission then announced the launch of a European Defence Fund and proposed a regulation - establishing a European Defence Industrial Development Programme to give financial support to the European arms industry. The Commission as well outlined possible future scenarios in a reflection paper on the future of European defence, based on the rationale that “the rising instability in Europe's neighbourhood as well as globally and new emerging security threats stemming from economic, environmental and technological drivers present important challenges for our security”.

Church and Peace as well as CEC opposed the diversion of such significant funding from the civilian EU budget to the defence industry and actions leading to turning the EU from a civilian project into a military alliance. Such increase in military funding has adverse effects on security, we said. “Instead of coordinating member state armament plans, and consequently *saving* considerable sums of money, Commission funds would be taken from the current – civilian – EU budget for military purposes. For us, a stronger Europe must take the form of security through social justice, respect for human rights, sustainable development, welcome and protection for threatened persons, fair relationships with all of the regions of the world - and comprehensive and deliberate efforts to strengthen civilian conflict resolution. (...) The European Union must invest, at long last, its expertise and financial resources in comprehensive development of mechanisms to de-escalate conflict and resolve conflict through civilian means. The heavy emphasis on military options, with a corresponding investment in human and financial resources, is a missed opportunity to develop a relevant strategy for a strong Europe of the future. Europe must neither drift further apart nor seek to deter, neither contribute to the causes of flight nor wall ourselves off. We must contribute to building trust and common security through our domestic and foreign policy by investing in stable living conditions for all people in Europe and worldwide, regardless of gender, age or origin.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy. [www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/EUGS.pdf](http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/EUGS.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CP-PR-EU-E\\_7-2016.pdf](https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CP-PR-EU-E_7-2016.pdf)

**November 2017:** The defence ministers of 23 members decided on the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). The EU High Representative Frederica Mogherini stated: “It is an example of how the European Union will serve Member States' priorities, can be efficient and how our integration is serving the citizens priorities. ”

Church and Peace commented: “The European citizens' priorities might include closer cooperation, efficiency and integration for the best of the people. In the context of defence cooperation it might make sense to 'harmonize' the different national military capacities and save tax payers money in avoiding any longer double defence spending and research (according to the EU Commission 25-100 billions annually could be saved).

But PESCO means as well:

- the *obligation to increase* defence expenses,
- *adding* to the 28 *national* defence expenditures of EU Member States several hundreds of millions of scarce EU budget resources to the European Defence Fund,
- increasing operations to 'protect' the European borders,
- risk for not respecting constitutional conditions for parliamentary approval.

Facing these facts we see PESCO as another way to pump further money into a highly inefficient European defence industrial landscape.”<sup>9</sup>

**February 2018:** The European Commission launches the debate on the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021 – 2027. It includes the proposal to build only one big “external instrument” instead of twelve different budget lines for “Development, Neighbourhood, Human Rights and Democracy, IcSP, Humanitarian Aid... – and Common Foreign and Security Policy”. The budget line should have “a strong focus on Migration”. That would mean to risk subverting the objectives of EU external action to internal priorities such as border management and migration control. Similarly the EU could use the funds to support its Member States’ security and defence cooperation or to build the capacities of military actors in its partner country. Another problem would be that the access of civil society to the funding would be even more difficult than today. Protest against these plans is urgent during the next month!

In a statement from the Church and Peace international conference in June 2018, we expressed alarm at the continuing trend of militarization. “Church and Peace calls on the churches in particular to engage in discussion on EU budgetary priorities, to lift up the importance of the EU as an agent of peace and reconciliation and to advocate for investing in peace with justice by putting into action the Sustainable Development Goals and supporting reconciliation processes.”<sup>10</sup>

## V. A theology of nonviolence

### 1. Security, Vulnerability and Violence

Security is the magic term. Everyone longs for security and needs security, personally and politically. “Security” has a history as political term.

Christine Schweitzer, a German peace scientist and activist says:

“The 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced the concept of human security into international political discourse. The report contrasts the Cold War concept of common security - - with the security needs of “ordinary people”.

Human security means “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”, i.e. protection from illness, hunger, unemployment, crime, social unrest, political oppression, and threats to the environment. ... Nevertheless: The idea of common security in Europe is still relevant today, in two respects. On the one hand, it has gained new meaning in relation to the relationship between the West and Russia, where the West, in political terms, now includes central European states. The current sabre-rattling

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PM11.17-E-finV.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Statement-to-EU-MFF\\_0618.pdf](https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Statement-to-EU-MFF_0618.pdf)

on both sides of the Russian border is extremely dangerous, especially since lines of communication established during the Cold War are no longer functioning. On the other hand, it is also possible to extend the concept (common security) to one of global common security.”<sup>11</sup>

In 2000 the Norwegian Church published a study on ‘VULNERABILITY AND SECURITY - Current challenges in security policy from an ethical and theological perspective’. It says: “A human being is a vulnerable creature. It has a need for and right to protection against threats to its life and liberty. This is the legitimate basic assumption of security policy. And this is where the ethical dilemmas linked to the use of force arise: what force is it permissible to use to defend oneself and others against atrocities? And - being vulnerable is part and parcel of human life. In other words, people will always be vulnerable... Vulnerability implies openness to one’s surroundings, to one’s fellow human beings, to specific others, which enable people to recognise the pain of others as their own and accept responsibility for alleviating the distress of others...Recognition of one’s own vulnerability and that of others is a prerequisite for a deeper understanding of security... Recognition of one’s own vulnerability will lead towards seeking cooperative solutions instead of conflict and the possible use of force... Great importance must therefore be attached to human vulnerability in the understanding of what security is. The fundamental significance of the encounter with the other person, the stranger, as the way to a truly human life and the opportunity for reconciliation and a new start is (as previously mentioned) deeply rooted in the Judaeo-Christian and humanist tradition.”<sup>12</sup>

But we want to be secure: Does nonviolence work? Fortunately there are now some – not at all enough - studies about the effects of nonviolent actions, which often are not at all seen, or communicated for example as part of the public news.

Christine Schweitzer reports: “The American scientists Erika Chenoweth and Maria Stephan studied 323 “resistance campaigns” (their term), both violent and nonviolent, between 1900 and 2006, 105 of which were non-violent. The study showed that, compared with violent campaigns, nonviolent campaigns were more than twice as likely (53%) to be successful. In other words, only one in four of the nonviolent campaigns failed altogether, whereas barely more than one in four (26%) of the violent campaigns was successful (2011:11). ...Between 2002 and 2006 the US-American organisation Collaborative for Development Action collected 13 case studies in which districts or even whole regions successfully kept themselves out of a violent conflict which was going on around them. “Opting Out of War” is the resulting book which, out of the study of these individual cases, derives a number of general factors which are common to all or most of the case studies...”<sup>13</sup>

She concludes: “The basic problem from a pacifist point of view is that military forces are available and that war is commonly a viable option. Nonviolent alternatives, on the other hand, are not available and therefore appear to be utopian. That is why we must continue to develop and build up social defence as an alternative to military defence and nonviolent intervention as an alternative to military intervention in conflict at every level of escalation.

One fundamental problem is the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate uses of lethal violence. Only when the killing of human beings is outlawed altogether, not just in the private sphere

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11 [http://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Lecture\\_Christine\\_Schweitzer-E.pdf](http://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Lecture_Christine_Schweitzer-E.pdf)

12 VULNERABILITY AND SECURITY Current challenges in security policy from an ethical and theological perspective, prepared by the Commission on International Affairs in Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, [https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/church-of-norway/dokumenter/kisp\\_vulnerab\\_00.pdf](https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/church-of-norway/dokumenter/kisp_vulnerab_00.pdf), S.4/5

13 Erika Chenoweth /Maria Stephan, Why civil resistance works. 2001

but also in politics; only when there are no longer any institutions in which people are taught to kill and in which killing is used (i.e. armed forces), will it be possible to overcome violence. In the meantime, we must accept that there is no such thing as absolute security, and no amount of state resources can create it.

To accept insecurity can be a way to struggle for one's own freedom. Many human rights activists and other activists throughout the world, who are daily threatened by death squads or police and military, speak about the importance of overcoming fear and the freedom which they have discovered when they have accepted the risks. Ultimately, security is only possible when it is enjoyed by everyone, not just one's own group. Security requires justice. Nonviolence is the way to create justice."

I turn to Maria Biedrawa, educated peace deacon, Catholic, member of the French branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and of the Church and Peace Board. She spends a lot of time every year in Sub-Saharan Africa and accompanies and trains peacemaker. At one of our conferences she spoke of the Biblical model of emotional and spiritual security.

She invited us to follow one moment of experience:

A young man is the leader of a militia that commits atrocities by order of the president. The history of the young man: he was rejected by his father, a former minister; he became a street child and was recruited by the militia. He uses his role as revenge toward his father, to gain justice. Already you have to cross his path and not be afraid of him. And then, talk to him of law? To someone who never was protected by the law?

There is only one way:

That is to welcome powerlessness and to welcome its limits, its confusion, with empty hands and sometimes with an empty heart. Our ability to provide security corresponds to the ability to accept one's own helplessness, to "welcome powerlessness and its limits, its confusions. The realization that security ultimately is to be found in God alone opens the door to a "Holy Land" where nonviolence can be born and right relationships formed.

Back to the young militia man: A man started walking around in the militia area, listening to them, softening them up a bit. He did not talk much, drank a coke with them, took an interest. But one day he said to the young man – after listening for a long time and forming a free relationship - and this phrase changed the young man's life: "My friend, you will never become just by using violence." He had understood the young man's deep desire and to express it, found the necessary words without any judgment, which had opened his eyes. At that time - the man did not know - the young man was charged with planning a massacre of 50 people. The militia man continued to pretend and at the decisive moment, he sent the militia in the wrong direction, gathered all the victims and led them to a radio station that broadcast the story for days. Then, of course, he had to leave the country. He has now become a human rights defender and works with street children. One of the moving stories Maria shared with us.

## 2. Responsibility to protect and military intervention as last resort

In 2005, the United Nations adopted the concept of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P). It consists of the responsibility to prevent, to intervene and to rebuild. 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 as responsibility to intervene. 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.

In 2009 Church and Peace said:

“Jesus met his own violent death with nonviolence, and his way remains the model for Christians to follow in overcoming violence. (...)”

1) The call to be his disciples means putting his nonviolence into practice. He is the heart of the Church. His nonviolence brings about the Kingdom of God where peace and justice reign. Rooted in this vision, all Churches are called to walk the path of nonviolence which Jesus defined in the Sermon on the Mount and which he put into practice.

2) Church and Peace understands the need to stand alongside people whose lives are threatened and who call for security and protection. (...)

4) Based on our understanding of Christian discipleship and peace-making, we oppose that section of the (R2P) Concept which allows the use of military force to ensure the protection of threatened peoples. Even if military force is held only in reserve for use as a measure of last resort, this influences the planning of civil action during the earlier phases of conflict by consuming a disproportionately high share of the resources available for aiding civilians. Also its availability strengthens the traditional attitude that military force is the inevitable answer. (...)

6) Even in situations where no solution seems possible and where violence is so endemic that a call to counter it with further violence rises amongst victims and within us too, we persist in recommending the use of nonviolent means towards every human being, means which we as disciples of Christ have in abundance.”<sup>14</sup>

And in 2011 Church and Peace said:

“We wish to challenge the ecumenical community to continue along the path toward peace. (...) This implies that the churches must reorient their political strategies: pleading for strengthened commitment to nonviolent intervention organized by the international community, inspired by models like Christian Peacemaker Teams and Peace Brigades International.(...) So we urgently ask the member churches of the WCC - and of CEC - whether they are still willing to take the commitment above. We are hoping that this would lead to an unambiguous statement from the churches against the military option for R2P - and for non-violent ways to intervene in armed conflicts, particularly now that the Vatican is also moving in this direction.”<sup>15</sup>

In 2013 the WCC Assembly at Busan/South-Korea adopted the Statement on the Way of Just Peace WCC, P.4.

“4. TOGETHER WE RECOMMEND THAT THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

a. Undertake, in cooperation with member churches and specialized ministries, critical analysis of the “Responsibility to Prevent, React and Rebuild” and its relationship to just peace, and its misuse to justify armed interventions”<sup>16</sup>

Today the question is still open – and we are still waiting for the answers of the WCC.

The next step on the ecumenical R2P-journey was the CEC Assembly 2018:

“In ecumenical fellowship with the WCC we deepen our understanding of the challenging dimensions of ‘just peace’ for every aspect of our personal and political life. In the 2001 Charta Oecumenica, European churches stated, ‘We commit ourselves to work for structures of peace, based on the nonviolent resolution of conflicts. We condemn any form of violence against the human person, particularly against women and children.’

We are aware, that even if violent means are held only in reserve for use as a last resort, this influences the planning of civil action during the earlier phases of conflict. Even in situations where

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14 [https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/PR\\_CaP\\_E\\_05.11.2011.pdf](https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/PR_CaP_E_05.11.2011.pdf)

15 <https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/R2P-English.pdf>

16 <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documentsstatements/the-way-of-just-peace>

no solution seems possible and where violence is so endemic that a call to counter it with further violence rises amongst victims and within us too, we persist in recommending the use of nonviolent means towards every human being, means which we as disciples of Christ have in abundance.

Key Points:

- Go forward to an understanding that nonviolence should be the primary and always preferred response. This includes that any military option should always be the *absolute* last resort.
- Deepen the discussions with churches and institutions about the political rationale of non-violence to arrive at sustainable peace as research shows and urge for further exploration and communication of results of and alternatives to violent conflict solution.
- Continue to explore the theological dimension of security, vulnerability, suffering, martyrria, active nonviolence, together with our partners who have longstanding experience with a theology and praxis of active non-violence (Society of Friends, Church and Peace).<sup>17</sup>

And finally, in June 2018 the Church and Peace conference reacted by stating that Church and Peace “welcomed the commitment of the recent Conference of European Churches (CEC) Assembly to move in the direction of nonviolence as the preferred response to conflict and violence. At the same time, the members challenged the churches to remove from the table the option of war or military intervention as “ultima ratio”, or the last resort, and instead to journey, step by step, towards nonviolence as both a first and last resort.”<sup>18</sup>

I end turning to the Mennonite Church and Peace fellow Neal Blough who encouraged us in a sermon:

Our organisation is called "Church and Peace." Let's not forget the "Church" part. The Church is called to be a school of peace, pardon and reconciliation. She is also the place where we are trained in the spirituality of peace, nonviolence and trust. We may be disappointed with our churches - by the Church with her history and failures. But that shows that as Christians we are no better than anyone else. Smooth talk, good, "pacifistly correct" speeches and work on good causes are not enough. In order to learn to confront our worries and lack of security we have to put down deep spiritual roots and cultivate trust. Then we can combat fear, stop demonising others, and admit that we too are tempted by attitudes and practices that are far removed from the Gospel of Peace. We need places and practices where we can learn to leave worry behind, so that we will not be afraid when our security is threatened. We cannot do this ourselves. For this, we need peace communities. As members of Church and Peace we need to contribute to those communities to make sure they are going in the right direction.

By the way of nonviolence Christ vanquished evil. He invites us to follow the same way and promises us that his Spirit will accompany us, giving us the needed strength to know where true security comes from.

Faced with anxiety and a lack of security, let's encourage our roots to grow deeply in order to produce the fruits of the Spirit.”<sup>19</sup>

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17 [https://assembly2018.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GEN\\_PUB\\_01\\_Public\\_Committee\\_Draft\\_Report\\_APPROVED\\_EN.pdf](https://assembly2018.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GEN_PUB_01_Public_Committee_Draft_Report_APPROVED_EN.pdf)

18 <https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/church-and-peace-calls-churches-to-nonviolence-on-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>

19 [https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Sermon\\_Neal\\_Blough.pdf](https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Sermon_Neal_Blough.pdf)