



# Church and Peace

## International Office

Church and Peace - the ecumenical peace church network of communities, training centres, peace organisations and peace service agencies in Europe

### "You can never solve problems with the same mindset that created them." (Albert Einstein)

*Board of Church and Peace applauds the awarding of the Bremen Peace Prize to Maria Biedrawa and sends out invitations to this year's European conference in Brussels*

*'Resisting War Today – Preparing Collective Nonviolent Alternatives'*

Wethen, 13.06.2024. The board of Church and Peace welcomes with great joy the awarding of **this year's Bremen Peace Prize**, presented by the Bremen-based foundation *die schwelle*<sup>1</sup>, to its board member **Maria Biedrawa**. She has been active in peace work for 20 years in various African countries, particularly in the Central African Republic where religions have been instrumentalised to fuel armed conflicts. Together with local groups, Maria Biedrawa supports the psychosocial and spiritual counselling of people who have experienced trauma to interrupt the spiral of retaliation. People feel empowered to build local security and peace processes together with their Christian or Muslim communities through nonviolent resistance and reconciliation work. As the European Ecumenical Peace Network Church and Peace, we feel honoured because Maria Biedrawa's commitment is also exemplary for that of many of our members.

Furthermore, we are delighted that Connection e.V.<sup>2</sup> was awarded the group peace prize simultaneously. For over 30 years, the association has been protecting conscientious objectors – today primarily people from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine – and demanding that the right to conscientious objection also and especially applies in times of war. Conscientious objection has been a human right recognised by the UN since 1987.

These honours are encouraging signs in times like these:

- The global armaments spiral is turning upwards: military spending has reached a peak of 2443 billion US dollars<sup>3</sup> in 2023, and further increases are foreseeable. Arms exports are being expanded instead of limited.
- This money is lacking for urgently needed, long overdue measures for climate justice, equitable development, education and social justice.
- This in turn creates further conflicts, violence and refugee movements within as well as between countries and regions.
- Civil society's scope for action is becoming ever narrower<sup>4</sup>: this includes restricting the discourse on alternatives to military security policy in view of the current conflicts and the political and financial framework conditions for concrete human rights, climate and peace work.

<sup>1</sup> <https://dieschwelle.de/en/home>

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.connection-ev.org/index.php>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2404\\_fs\\_milex\\_2023.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2404_fs_milex_2023.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/themen/atlas-der-zivilgesellschaft/>



# Church and Peace

## International Office

*Church and Peace* - the ecumenical peace church network of communities, training centres, peace organisations and peace service agencies in Europe

- The Peace Report 2024 of the German peace research institutes states: 'The political projects of global governance of the 1990s and 2000s – strengthening and expanding multilateral institutions, promoting democratisation, externally supported peacebuilding – have come to a standstill or failed over the past decade and a half. Future-oriented ideas for the political formation of a new global era are rare.'<sup>5</sup>

History teaches us that wars lead to more suffering, death and injustice and end bitterly for people on all sides. As if there were no alternative to reacting to escalating violence and conflicts with more and more counter-violence. To paraphrase Albert Einstein: 'Problems can never be solved with the same mindset that created them.'

As Christians, we are challenged to renew our thinking (Romans 12:2) and to follow Jesus' example by standing up together against injustice and violence. Nonviolence is an active form of resistance. Over the past decades, a variety of forms of nonviolent resistance have been developed and researched, which are now more relevant than ever for rethinking security<sup>6</sup> and which form the basis for work on methods such as civil conflict transformation and social defence.

We will take up these themes **at this year's Church and Peace European Conference in Brussels** (<https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2024/06/european-conference-2024/>) **from 24 to 27 October 2024**. Guests and members from war-affected regions such as Ukraine, Russia and the Central African Republic will join us to discuss the opportunities and limits of nonviolent resistance in times of war.

We will explore the connection between freedom of expression and conscience and civil resistance in the context of war and (re)discover methods, especially how community engagement can interrupt the spiral of violence. The conference will also be a place for communal mourning for the victims of violence, for the feeling of powerlessness as well as rebellion, and for praying for God's renewing and empowering spiritual strength.

In the face of growing nationalism, right-wing populism and xenophobia in Europe, we will meet in Brussels, the European centre of power, and network with partner organisations that work for a Europe of peace and solidarity.<sup>7</sup>

### Press Contact:

Antje Heider-Rottwilm, Chair of Church and Peace, +49 172 5162 799

<sup>5</sup> <https://friedensgutachten.de/en> ; German edition page 5

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sicherheitneudenken.de/sicherheit-neu-denken-unsere-vision/international/englisch/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/2024/05/key-questions-for-candidates-of-the-2024-european-elections/>