



Nonviolent Resistance – Rethinking Security

***Is the sword to keep devouring forever? Do you not know that the end will be bitter?
(2 Sam 2:26)***

Wethen, 4 November 2024 – Challenged by this biblical verse, this year's European conference of the ecumenical network Church and Peace in Brussels engaged with relevant models and experiences on “**Resisting war today – preparing collective nonviolent alternatives**”.

The initiatives of **Stop Fuelling War**¹ show quite practically that essential initial engagement consists in questioning arms production and the arms trade, and calling for disarmament – including atomic weapons. Hence Stop Fuelling War demonstrates regularly at Eurosatory in Paris, one of the world's biggest exhibitions for arms sales. Participants stand there to appeal to the conscience of the public and also to that of arms producers and arms dealers.

But another purpose is to indicate nonviolent paths to security. **Nonviolent Peaceforce International**² has experience with how **nonviolent civil intervention** works: people provide unarmed civil protection, without partiality, in teams made up of 70% from the local population and 30% from international visitors. The visitors basically do not take part in actions that call into question their impartiality. Examples are in South Sudan or Indonesia, where the population needs protection from militias and organised crime. A team is currently being prepared for service in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

After the violent death of the African-American George Floyd in the United States, the police was not able to contain the uprising. Local communities commissioned individuals trained in nonviolent civil intervention by Nonviolent Peaceforce International. These teams achieved more than “only” stop spontaneous expressions of outrage that flared up into violence. They de-escalated the conflicts and restored the neighbourhood's sense of community without abandoning the demand for more justice.

It is local communities that can keep up nonviolent resistance, change power structures and even achieve win-win solutions. **Community Building** means practicing social power, according to **Refo-Moabit**³ in Berlin. For two years they have been part of the campaign Soziale Verteidigung/Wehrhaft ohne Waffen (social defence/resilient without weapons).⁴ It is about boosting resilience in peace times as a basis for social defence in times of war.

The Refo Moabit project is an example of how the church can strengthen initiatives and provide spaces for relations to arise in the community and district, for trust to grow - and so form the foundation for peace-building and nonviolent conflict transformation.

Examples of **social defence** from Kosovo/a and Lithuania show the dilemma aggressors fall into when people refuse to cooperate and choose the strategy of **social defence**. This

¹ <https://stopfuellingwar.org/en/>

² <https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/>

³ <https://www.refo-moabit.de/>

⁴ <https://wehrhaftohneaffen.de/ueber-uns/>



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

delegitimises dominance with nonviolent methods. It disobeys and so makes visible the wrongdoing of the aggressor. That also applies to the less well-known examples from Ukraine,⁵ but also to courageous individuals in Russia and Belarus.

Rethinking security,⁶ a movement initiated in 2018 by the Protestant Church in Baden, gives ideas for thought and action at the political level as to how we can move from exclusively military security to a civil security policy. It is about justice-based external relations, sustainable development of EU accession candidates and neighbouring states, participating in international security architecture, resilient democracy and conversion of the German armed forces and weapons industry. In a dialogical process, groups in the Netherlands, Austria, the United Kingdom, France and Switzerland, plus a network in Africa, have taken up the basic idea and are passing it on to their respective context. Last year the initiative published its 4th discussion paper on the topic of *Rethinking security strategies: stopping and overcoming violence. In Israel and Palestine. In Ukraine. Globally.*⁷

Against this background, CHURCH AND PEACE appeals

- **to the EU and its member states** to make 2% of military spending available for civil peace-building measures and instruments for civil conflict management;
- **to community leaders** to find out about nonviolent alternatives for security within their sphere of competence, and to use and promote them;
- **to citizens and peace activists** to undergo training in civil peace services, forms of nonviolent resistance and ways to disseminate them in the media;
- **to the churches** to remain faithful to Jesus' nonviolence; to take up their respective mission for the common good and for peace as think tanks with their congregations; to be the leaven of peace in our societies through spiritual, theological and practical empowerment.

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⁵ <https://www.icip.cat/en/publication/ukrainian-nonviolent-civil-resistance-in-the-face-of-war/>

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

⁷ <https://www.sicherheitneudenken.de/impulspapiere-2/>