

## „Just Peace – the dream that comes true“ – Gerechter Frieden – der Traum wird wahr

JOUR FIXE AUF DEM 33. DEUTSCHEN EVANGELISCHEN KIRCHENTAG

### Just peace: A definition, a declaration – and a dream

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends,

I want to thank the *Konrad Adenauer Foundation* for inviting me to address this august gathering and such a distinguished audience of politicians, scientists, entrepreneurs, artists, church leaders and others, representing all walks of life of the German society. It is great to be here together with you.

We have different languages when we speak about peace. As we represent different forms of knowledge, power, experience and wisdom, we also participate in different discourses, or, if I may use the image of the upcoming Pentecost, we speak with different tongues. As a leader in the ecumenical movement I want to take this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts – my dream for peace. This dream is nurtured by the impulses from the Biblical tradition, from experiences churches have had, from events and programs in the ecumenical movement, from voices of church leaders I hear around the world, from testimonies from ordinary people living in all kind of contexts and challenges, from expectations you and others have towards the churches. I believe that those (of you) who are making decisions on behalf of others need different languages and different images to stimulate your creativity and your courage, to be able to see what is not yet a reality – but what we are striving for.

We need dreams. If we don't have dreams about what we want to become true, we are not quite realistic. We are all quite used to setting goals. We should not underestimate the power of definitions, and how important it is to define something not yet seen.

There are needs for definitions of what we are aiming at that have the power to change our plans and politics. Those definitions of what we are aiming at could be expressed as a dream. And we know the power of that language from the words of Martin Luther King jr.

A radical realism in the form of dreams is required to open the space for serious dialogue on the challenges we are facing together. The weight of the problems around and ahead of us is about to paralyze our capacity for common and decisive action. In such a situation it needs both, the courage to confront the seriousness of the threats, but also a vision for the future, a dream that

- gives us direction,
- is focusing our common efforts, and
- motivates us when we are about to despair.

We all need an open dialogue on both the problems we are facing and the vision that keeps us going. I am convinced that we urgently need a new dialogue of different actors in our societies, of politicians, scien-

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tists, and artists, of entrepreneurs and trade unions, of church members and, definitely, of people of different religions. We need a dialogue, which helps us to make new definitions, to overcome divisions and to develop a new language and understanding that will open doors for new solutions.

Why not make use of the forum that the German Kirchentag in the historically significant city of Dresden. Dresden will remain as a sign of the destructiveness of war and the ability to rebuild peace. What can this event provide us with to take new steps towards making a dream come true? It would re-energize this space and would, indeed, be congenial with the vision of its founders.

In addition to the dreams and the definitions, we need the declarations. One declaration about peace has been repeated more than many others: "Glory to God and peace on earth." Together with 1000 Christians from all confessions and continents, and some representatives of other religious traditions, we gathered two weeks ago in Kingston, Jamaica for an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC). We shared our dreams under the motto of the declaration of the angels at Christmas, which has been echoed in Christian liturgy every Sunday since then. This double declaration: Glory to God – and peace on earth, is needed.

The work for peace needs a dimension that goes beyond any ideology, political system, superpower, military balance, above any religious movement or religious authority. To give glory to God is exactly the perspective the church is called to offer to all peace-making and peace-building. There is something more distinguished, more honourable, something which is lasting longer than our needs, something independent of our failure or success. To give glory to God above all human authorities will always be a sign of how we respect life as sacred, the value of each being created in the image of God. To make peace is to give glory to God who is above all our intentions and plans. This declaration of glory to God is exactly the message of the incarnation: We honour

God the creator of all human beings and the whole nature of the world, the God who is becoming one of us, participating in the life of human beings in this world.

Under this declaration "Glory to God and peace on earth" we- the World Council of Churches – have developed our dream, or definition, our declaration, we have named it a *Call to Just Peace* (gerechter Frieden). It is formulated in a short document to inspire Christians all over the world to find ways to work for just peace for all on this one planet on which we are living, and where we hope some can be living after us. This dream is rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ and his declaration, his dream and his definition of the kingdom of God, and our prayer at this day of Ascension –as he taught us to pray: Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

#### **A dream of just peace in the midst of our realities**

In Kingston we discussed with one another, we shared experiences of violence, war, poverty and despair, as well as signs of peace and hope from all kinds of contexts and cultures around the world. We all know well four of the most burning issues for the survival of Humankind and peace on earth today:

1. The violence, as human suffering as well as systemic oppression, in many communities around the world, from the family to the streets, to the nations;
2. the challenge of climate change that severely damages the future of life;
3. the daily deadly consequences of massive poverty and
4. the enormous financial resources used to produce weapons and the capacity to destroy life with the horrific arsenal of nuclear arms that surrounds us.

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We also know that the interactions between these factors make them even more dangerous and destructive, and that the most vulnerable are those who will also become the first victims. If we add to the list the issue of diseases we see that even more clearly: We know that the combination of poverty, environmental disasters, and diseases is a deadly one.

#### **A growing consensus towards just peace**

It was against this background that the WCC pledged to develop its vision of just peace. We declared in our call to just peace, and discussed in the four days of our work in Kingston, that we are willing to work for just peace by making

1. Peace in the community;
2. Peace with the Earth
3. Peace in the marketplace, and
4. Peace among the nations.

Many do complain about the lack of will or even ability among politicians today to respond to these four challenges in coordinated international action. Surely, this is partly due to strong interests of powerful actors who still profit from the status quo. Another important reason for the paralysis we can observe, however, seems to be a lack of empathy for the lives and the suffering of others. I do believe that indifference to the plight of the other blocks ethical approaches to address those threats to life and undermines cooperation beyond the boundaries of nations and religions.

The *Call to Just Peace* that was shared with participants at the IEPC in Kingston speaks of it in the following way:

On the Way of Just Peace the justifications of armed conflict and war become increasingly implausible and unacceptable. The churches have struggled with their disagreement on this matter for decades; however, the Way of Just Peace now compels us to move forward. Yet, to condemn

war is not enough; we must do everything in our power to promote justice and peaceful cooperation among peoples and nations. The Way of Just Peace is fundamentally different from the concept of "just war" and much more than criteria for protecting people from the unjust use of force; in addition to silencing weapons it embraces social justice, the rule of law, respect for human rights and shared human security.

Within the limitations of tongue and intellect, we propose that Just Peace may be comprehended as *a collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.*

This sounds perhaps complicated, but the basic criteria and the direction in which we want to move forward are clear. Just peace is a vision, a dream that has already motivated the prophets in the Hebrew Bible when they saw the lion and the lamb in peaceful harmony. For Christians, it is a dream that already came true when Jesus Christ reconciled the world with God on the cross. Led by the cross of Christ, we can accept our own vulnerability so that we are free for the other, for her or his suffering and yearning for justice and peace.

The World Council of Churches was established after the great disaster of the Second World War. The voice of the WCC has since 1948 been "No more war". We are today living a decisive moment of human history on our planet Earth. In 1974 the World Council of Churches addressed for the first time three interrelated threats to the survival of humankind: the nuclear inferno, the deadly consequences of massive poverty and the environmental crisis. The ever-accelerating development of science and technology coupled with the fossil fuel-based development path and an uncritical emphasis on unlimited economic growth were celebrated as models for progress. However, at the same time these increased

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the potential for self-destruction. It was clear that humanity had reached a threshold which required a change in direction.

In response, the WCC started to explore the vision of a *just, participatory and sustainable society*. Recognizing that the necessary turn-around had indeed a deeper spiritual dimension, which challenged the very being of the churches, in 1983 the WCC called for a *conciliar process on justice, peace and the integrity of creation*. The conciliar process was enthusiastically received by many people in a then-divided Germany. Ecumenical assemblies in both the GDR and the Federal Republic and at the European level in Basel (1989) prepared the way for the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of your country.

The changing historical context as well as the need to explore more specific responses to the threats, led the WCC to concentrate on the critique of the prevailing economic paradigms the following years. This included support for the negotiations on climate change and on developing a programme to overcome violence as three distinct, but inter-related processes. In 2001, the WCC initiated a *Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV)*, which ended this year with the *International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC)* in Kingston, Jamaica.

There is now a growing consensus among the churches and movements in the churches on the issues of peace. Let me point to some important factors that were manifested more strongly in the Peace Convocation this year:

There is a wider and more comprehensive understanding of peace established. This is reflected in the four dimensions through which we discussed peace in Jamaica. It means that the role of the churches as peace makers is seen from below. It is not only as negotiations among state leaders, but rather from the perspective of making change in the local realities, focusing on how ordinary people have a fair chance to build a future together and to overcome conflicts.

From this perspective, the effect of environmental and economic crises for the stability for life together becomes a matter of great concern for peace, locally and globally. This corresponds to the debates on the definition of peace related to the Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize Committee, who has over many years followed the same line of expanding the dimension of peace making and peace building to include initiatives for social development, economic justice, care for environmental issues and basic human rights. The need for a multifaceted and comprehensive understanding of peace becomes very evident in a gathering of people from the churches around the world.

People living in areas of conflicts, injustice, killings and violence give a very realistic picture of the world today, and how the dialogue for peace must go deep into all dimensions of society in the many contexts of the world today. The churches represent and have a strong sense of what is going on among peoples in the world. I don't know of any other network that is so present in the daily reality of our world. However, a gathering like this also offers examples of how churches as fellowships of human beings and as institutions can make a difference in many contexts.

The paradigms of war inherited from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are fading away, and we get new focal points on how to overcome conflicts that are not any longer related to an ideological cold war or ideological conflict between nations. The *Decade to Overcome Violence* was more and more marked by the shift of the mainly US-dominated international system to the more complex multipolar realities of today and the emergence of new conflicts and wars, often with an important religious component. However, the fact that religion is increasingly used as an ideology for giving identity and political direction in several parts of the world has also lead us to use of religion as ideology to defend use of violence and even conflicts that can be described in terms of war. This is often described in terms of extremism but we have to admit that it includes more than that.

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The building of state identities defined by religion (Jewish state, Islamic states) implies potential and present discrimination of minorities, violence and potential conflicts between different groups. There is a growing consensus in the ecumenical movement and among many churches (so-called mainline churches but also evangelical and Pentecostal partners) that the use of religious traditions should not be linked to ideologies or political programs of this kind.

The WCC has promoted the position that any ethical discussion should be guided by the supreme call to prevent the disasters and destructions of war. This is increasingly our common focal point as far as I can see.

We realized in the debates before and following especially the two Gulf wars, the occupation of Iraq and the war in Afghanistan that the old *just war theory* was no longer sufficient to guide the churches in their public witness and that we had to develop a new *vision of just peace* open to dialogue with people of other religions and other actors in society. The just war theory was originally an attempt to tame the deadly monster of war, but it had often been used to justify the use of military force even in violation of its own criteria. It clearly reached its limit with the availability and possible use of weapons of mass destruction and the dramatically growing toll of civilian victims in contemporary warfare. The main reason, however, to move on was the insight that the various war scenarios— from clashes between ethnic groups, civil war, and inter-state conflicts to military interventions by coalitions of states— required actions for peace at a much earlier state in the development of the conflict. It was necessary to take steps which were accepted by all conflicting parties as just solutions to the underlying causes of their tensions. Once people begin to fight, it becomes far more difficult, if not impossible, to shift from the use of weapons back to peaceful means of conflict resolution such as humanitarian assistance and education for disadvantaged groups, shared power agreements, etc.

There is, however not yet an agreement among the churches about the role of the theories of “just war” and whether they still can be used to prevent war. One example was the disagreement exposed in Kingston between the peace activist Paul Oestreicher and the former prime minister of Norway, Kjell Magne Bondevik. The prime minister defended the right to military activity in the case of defense, but told how he refused the invitation by president George Bush jr. to participate in the invasion of Iraq by declaring that there was no just case for this war – with an explicit reference to the discussion on just war – in this case strongly initiated by the WCC and followed up by the Church of Norway.

However, there is a growing agreement that the focus on the just war theory can result in more justification of war and use of violence more than preventing war to be used to solve conflicts, and therefore another focus in Christian ethics about peace is needed. Furthermore, the important discussions about the responsibility to protect (particularly after the terrible genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia in the 1990s) shows that this responsibility cannot be easily ignored, but can also be an unclear and blurred criterion (as we see in the present involvement of NATO in Libya where the initiatives to protect human beings from the attacks of Ghadaffi lead forces can result in a situation of war where basic humanitarian needs are at stake).

There is a growing understanding that “just peace” must be our focal point in any discussion about peace. Justice and peace cannot be separated in the work for peace. There is no sustainable peace without a proper level of justice, particular in the meaning of transformative justice which is focused on how reconciliation can be established and new life together can be nurtured. The possibility to promote and build justice is very limited in a situation of war, and peace in the sense of solving conflicts is to a large extent a precondition for building a just and sustainable local or world community.

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There is a growing consensus for just peace among the churches in the world in the sense that there is a growing commitment to work for justice and peace as an integrated part of our common Christian calling. This was manifested in many ways through the Decade to Overcome Violence and the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation. This focus is uniting the churches and there is a growing consensus that the unity we are aiming at as churches needs to reflect the values of just peace and actively include work for justice, reconciliation and peace.

#### **Only a dream? The lack of empathy**

The dream of just peace is – unfortunately – not a reality, but desperately needed in our time. So please bear with me when I disturb you now with some unpleasant remarks concerning our present context and some problems of the past that still haunt us today.

9/11 has forever become the number for terror, the most visible and yet incredible ability to ignore the rights, the dignity and sacredness of the life of others, of innocent people. Immediately after the event in 2001 there has been a rather wide but sorry to say, very short common understanding of the need for bringing the responsible to justice, but that it should not happen as an exercise of the same calibre to avoid even worse things to happen...

However, this led to the so-called war on terror, the war in Afghanistan, to some extent the war in Iraq was given a motivation to stop terrorism.

From the last event some weeks ago, the so-called Operation Geronimo, many of you will remember the photos of US President Barack Obama and his team taken in the White House situation room. The group was watching the commando operation that killed the al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. One of the photos shows the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, with her hand to her mouth. It looks like a gesture of anguish or anxiety. Ms Clinton, however, declared a

day later that there was no reason to think that she might have had that kind of reaction – only preventing one early spring allergic cough. Why was it necessary for a person of power to reject the impression that she displayed a very human reaction to the terrible images of the death of a person? What does this say about the context she – and we - live in, that it is perceived to be a sign of weakness if she is affected by such a situation?

I am afraid the story of this photo is indicative of the dangerous lack of empathy for the other which troubles our societies and blocks the possibility for constructive, just and peaceful solutions for today's problems. Sensitivity to and empathy for the suffering of the other and the recognition of our own vulnerability are pre-conditions for any inter-normative ethical approach that affirms the unity of the human race and our common humanity beyond our diverse realities and differences.

There are reasons to believe that lack of empathy for the plight of the other and indifference became endemic during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was the most violent century in human history, the century of the extreme wars and the development of weapons of extreme capacities. This explains growing insensitivity to the suffering of others and massive denial of the consequences of injustice and violence, as going hand in hand with the constant search for entertaining distractions with the phenomenon of what has been called psychic numbing.

#### **Dreams become true in healing of memories and reconciliation**

I am referring to this history because I do believe that we can only overcome numbing and denial if we confront ourselves with the deep memories that continue to block our openness to meet the challenges we are facing today. Healing of memories is an essential component of the process of reconciliation that liberates us from enmity and leads to renewed relationships and the sharing of life in new ways.

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There are also encouraging examples, for instance of the German churches. Let me recall:

- the 1945 Stuttgart declaration of guilt- which opened the doors to the participation of the German churches in the World Council of Churches (WCC);

- the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (Aktion Sühnezeichen), founded in 1958, which organized work camps for thousands and thousands of young people in western and eastern Europe with the goal of "reconciliation with those nations and peoples occupied by Nazi Germany or threatened with annihilation; and to develop the aptitude for peace"<sup>i</sup>

- the widely debated EKD "Ostdenkschrift" that opened the way for reconciliation with Poland and the peoples of the former Soviet Union;

- the intense work of the church led by Präses Nikolaus Schneider for reconciliation with Herero and Nama in Namibia;

- and last but not least, the committed participation of many German Christian groups, congregations and churches in the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence which culminated just a couple of weeks ago at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica (17-24 May 2011). Let me here mention names like Margot Kässmann, Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, Fernando Enns and Konrad Raiser as key figures in these processes and events. Without them and the substantial support from EKD and other ecumenical partners in Germany like Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst, Brot für die Welt and Evangelisches Missionswerk, the Decade, this event, and the accompanying documents would not have become a reality.

I could add to these examples from your country many other initiatives promoted or supported by churches internationally. The process of ending apartheid and the following process for promoting truth and reconciliation in South Africa remains an open

inspiration to all of us. Next week I will hand over copies of documents from the WCC archives to the authorities of Brazil as a contribution to their efforts to let the truth be known about the former military dictatorship – as a process of healing memories.

There are many other stories to be told about healing of memories and reconciliation in many other countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Together with the WCC, churches have accompanied the peace processes in Northern Ireland and Sudan and have been working with great energy and commitment to overcome inter-religious tensions and conflicts in Nigeria, Indonesia and a number of other countries around the globe. Another major concern for the churches continues to be the struggle for just peace to end the conflict in Israel/ Palestine. Particularly in this conflict it is obvious how there can be no peace without a proper level of justice but I do fear (when I hear the rhetoric used now) that illegal settlements can become almost irremovable obstacles for a sustainable peace.

One of the most motivating examples for the engagement of young Christians in Israel/ Palestine is the WCC's Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). This programme brings youth from around the world to the West Bank to experience life under occupation and to provide protective presence to vulnerable communities, monitor and report human rights abuses and support Palestinians and Israelis working together for peace. At present the 39<sup>th</sup> group of ecumenical accompaniers is in place.

I would love to say more about the convocation, but I hope that these few examples are clear enough! I trust you can see that once we begin to move out of the paralysis, out of the world of political correctness and polls that dictate what politicians have to say in the world of mass media, when we leave behind what haunts us, and start working for reconciliation and peace, we gain strength and build up our capacity not

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only to overcome the problems of the past, but also to address the challenges of today.

### Crossing boundaries in a dialogue of life

At this stage, we invite not only Christians and churches worldwide for dialogue on the vision of just peace. This task leads us into new territories. We have to find new language and practices that help us to cross the dividing boundaries and to share life on our planet despite age old differences and tensions.

We cannot do this alone. While our own motivation is deeply rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ, we know that we have to find a common language with people from all different sectors of society and as people of faith especially with our neighbours of other religions.

I use the term 'common language' in order to indicate that this is neither about relativizing the strong convictions of others nor to gloss over differences and the rich diversity of our various contexts and traditions, nor just a matter of agreeing to very general and rather "thin" principles that do not stand the test of real conflict. What the churches through the WCC offer is a dialogue of life at all levels – local, national, international – with no pre-conditions other than a readiness to engage in it and the common goal to foster peace across the boundaries that separate us.

Let me, before I end, share with you a poem of a Norwegian poet that gives me courage to use the language of dreams in my work.

This is the dream that we carry through the world,

that something wonderful will happen,

that it has to happen,

that time will open by itself,

that doors shall open by themselves,

that the heart will find itself open,

that mountain springs will jump up,

that the dream will open by itself,

That we one early morning

will slip into a harbour

that we have never known.

(Olav H Hauge/translation: R. Bly).

I hope I can find allies among you for carrying the dream of just peace through the world.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. the Statuts of Aktion Sühnezeichen