

Nonviolence and Just Peace



Contributing to the Catholic Understanding
of and Commitment to Nonviolence



Introduction

To seek peace, deep peace rooted in justice, shalom - not a mere absence of war, but the fullness of life for all – that is the Christian vocation and way of life. As followers of the One who is Peace, who on the cross overcame the violence of our world and who then called for peace and modelled forgiveness, we are called to help move our broken and violated world toward the full flowering of the New Creation, repeating Jesus way of active, nonviolent, persistent, risky, creative peacemaking.

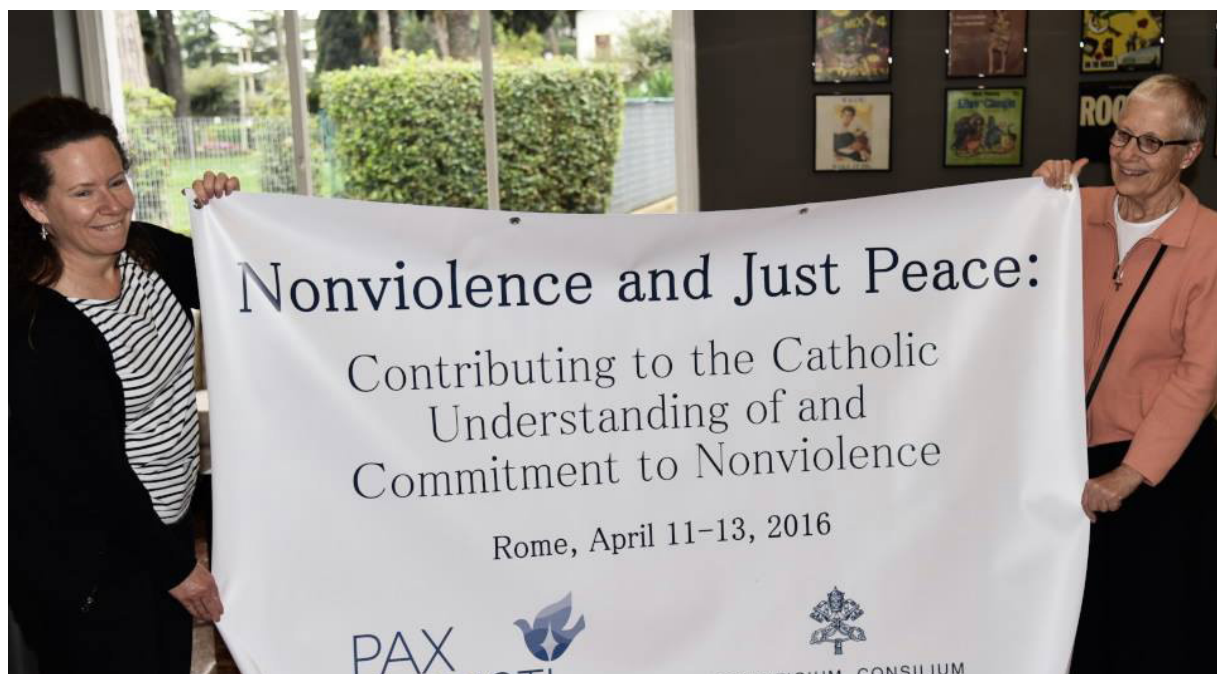
Nonviolence and Just Peace is a new global initiative reaffirming the centrality of active nonviolence to the vision and message of Jesus, to the life of the Catholic Church, and to the long-term vocation of healing and reconciling both people and the planet.

This bold initiative was launched at the Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference held in Rome April 11-13, 2016 and co-sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Pax Christi International, and others, including the leadership of international religious congregations.

Lay people, theologians, members of religious congregations, priests and bishops from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Oceania gathered to call on the Catholic Church to take a clear stand for active nonviolence and against all forms of violence.

In his message to the conference, Pope Francis said:

“Your thoughts on revitalizing the tools of nonviolence, and of active nonviolence in particular, will be a needed and positive contribution.”



Models of Active Nonviolence

REV. FRANCISCO DE ROUX, SJ (COLOMBIA)

We faced radical opposition when we were working in the Magdalena region for fourteen years, with the poor ones, the excluded and the victims. Several times we were considered suspicious, dangerous, and unacceptable whether for the paramilitaries, the military, the guerrilla or the local governments.

The guerrilla captured us and had decided to execute us during a trial, and we received many death threats from the paramilitary. As so many others, we understood that Jesus' peace goes together with unavoidable opposition and violence. Our purpose was to **accompany the regional communities in a program of development and peace in the middle of the conflict**, in a territory as big as Belgium. But the paramilitaries assassinated twenty four persons of our team, and the guerrillas killed three of our companions.

Nevertheless, we kept looking for peace in the Magdalena region. **Talking with the guerrillas, the paramilitaries and the army**. Trying to demonstrate that there was a way to work together, if we took the risk of opening ourselves up to human dignity, present in each and every one of us. The kind of dignity we all just carry inside because we are human beings, sharing life and existence in this universe. The dignity we as Christians see as the manifestation of God's mystery, the gift of His absolute love in each and every person, in each and every creature, in the world.

MARCO GHISONI (ITALY)

Giovanni XXIII" went to refugee camps in Croatia, challenged and shocked by the Yugoslavia conflict that was raging a few hundred kilometers from Italy, and motivated by the desire not to let war victims be alone. They discovered that it is possible to live in a war, even as foreign and unarmed civilians. Unarmed civilians are the major victims of today's wars, they cannot run away, they are the most defenseless, so they must be the protagonists of conflict resolution.

We firmly believe that, **by living with the victims of war**, unexpected paths towards peace can start: day by day, living with people under siege, in shacks or tents, without electricity or running water, sharing the same poor and dangerous conditions that all the civilians in war are forced to live with, under continuous armed attacks.

REV. STEPHEN ASHOK OMI (SRI LANKA)

Sri Lanka suffered a 30 year old war which brought suffering to many people both in North and South of the country equally, irrespective of class, clan, creed and nationality. The Centre for Society and Religion, popularly known as CRS began the mission of rehabilitating the victims of war soon after the war ended in 2009. This mission was called "**The ministry of presence**", being with the victims, listening to them, trying to look for ways and means of getting support to fulfil their basic human needs such as food, clothing, sanitation and medication.

LORETA CASTRO (PHILIPPINES)

What catalysed the people's nonviolent resistance against the Marcos dictatorship was the murder of opposition leader former Senator Ninoy Aquino when he returned to the Philippines from his exile, on August 21, 1983. The August Twenty-One Movement (ATOM) was organized and soon began an almost daily mobilization of protest rallies. The option of active nonviolence was embraced by those who believed that this was a path of resistance that we could take instead of violence. The Catholic Church took a leading role in this movement. An organisation called **Aksyon Para sa Kapayapaan at Katarungan** (AKKAPKA) was organized and was led by Jesuit, Fr. Jose Blanco. Many active nonviolence trainings involving various sectors of society were held and I can say that the success of the so-called People Power Revolt of 1986 can be attributed to this active nonviolence movement.



REV. JAMAL KHADER DAIBES (PALESTINE)

The church in the Holy Land expressed its pastoral care through its institutions. The Pontifical Mission for Palestine was created in 1952 to help the Palestinian refugees; the Christian schools are present in every parish; the Christian charitable organisations are open to help the most needy and vulnerable society: orphanages, house for the elderly and the handicapped, and many other institutions.

Education takes priority in the work of the church. Through education, the church empowers young people, teaches the values of the Gospel and spreads its message of salvation. The educational institutions include Christians and non-Christians as well. The values of justice, peace, coexistence and nonviolence are the basic values of the schools and universities.

BISHOP PARIDE TABAN (SOUTH SUDAN)

The best example I give you is the **Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron** at www.kuronvillage.net. The Peace Village came out of my dream during the civil war. I wanted to create a village where individuals and communities could interact and relate friendly without threat and fear. The village was created in 1997 and has grown ever since. It brings together people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and offers social and economic services including peace education that are meant to sustain peaceful coexistence among the various people. The Peace Village has the potential to offer people from Sudan, the region and the world a **model for reconciliation that is grounded on sound spiritual and human values**.

ELIZABETH KIMAU (KENYA)

We began by training the elders who are the key decision makers. They were taken away from the violence zone to a peaceful area (More than 600km). The elders started to interact, listen to each other; and perceive each other as human beings. These elders visited various villages to ask people to unite and take responsibility to build their own peace. Secondly a team of Morans/warriors (key perpetrators to the conflict) were **trained in nonviolent communication**. Some confessed how they were to kill each other during several violent attacks. They decided to remain friends. When they went back they resolved to preach peace to their peers and keep them from raiding or killing. The women whose children and husbands had been killed by the bloody conflicts were also trained. **All these people became agents of peace in their region.**

MERWYN DE MELLO (AFGHANISTAN)

I am an Advisor to the peacebuilding project of International Assistance Mission (IAM), a Christian NGO, with a 50 year presence in country. I humbly venture that my life journey and work as a peacebuilder are intertwined within the principles of nonviolent presence and living. The culture and philosophy of active nonviolence shaped our Peacebuilding Project activities dedicated to the goal of greater peace and stability in Afghan homes, communities and organisations. **We look at opportunities and gateways for peace that exist in the Afghan culture, traditions and that lie embedded in the Islamic faith expression.** The pathways created by active nonviolent response give voice to and build capacity of the majority that choose the path of active nonviolence.

We value diversity in their communities, we accept, appreciate and celebrate it! We raise awareness about cycles of violence and **trauma healing** and the importance of those concepts in building peace in their communities: we use conflict resolution skills in their day to day life: we promote practices that apply indigenous methods and tools that are culturally and religiously appropriate in teaching about and resolving conflicts. We incorporate Islamic principles of nonviolence into peacebuilding work – Islamic nonviolence principles exhort adherents to nonviolent practice and living.



Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence

NORA CARMI (PALESTINE)

My Armenian roots and my 69 years of Palestinian experience, have brought me to a strong conviction: that the Armenian Genocide, the Palestinian Nakba 'catastrophe' that made me a refugee, and the ongoing Israeli occupation and terrible injustice cannot be "just" or be part of God's "plans" for those created in His image. In 1919, my Armenian grandfather wrote in the foreword to his memoirs "I have great hope that by reading these life memoirs, my children will learn to scorn injustice and face hardship, never to get discouraged, and become leaders in control of their lives and models of behaviours to other." The Nakba brought new dispossession and more suffering but without grudge or hatred, the family continued to serve all the communities with equity and Christian love. I inherited that legacy of not reacting to evil with evil.

ROSE MARIE BERGER (USA)

By the time we come to a place where violence seems the only option, the failure is not simply in the moment, but in how we arrived at the apparent lack of options. The time to address a situation is before it devolves to violence. Once we are in the midst of violent conflict, peacemakers must be active in negotiating justice between the warring parties and interceding on behalf of the victims—all the while building the groundwork of a just peace. The prayer we are called to is at once profoundly personal and profoundly political. It consists of contemplation and resistance. Contemplation is the process of dismantling illusions and authentically seeking truth. Resistance is the act of rebuilding, both personally and politically, on a firm and true foundation.

MAIREAD MAGUIRE (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Living as we did between the violence of illegal paramilitary groups and State repression in Northern Ireland, many people in the civil community found themselves having to make a choice between violence and nonviolence. One young man, Danny, told me he was in the Irish Republic Army and joined the 'armed struggle' because it was a 'Just War' struggle, and the Catholic Church, he said blesses Just Wars. I realized that though I came from a Catholic background, living in a Catholic community, I had never

read the 'Just War' theology and had not been taught Jesus's Nonviolence, much less a clear moral calling to reject violence, and follow the Sermon on the Mount. Living in the midst of State violence I was forced to ask myself 'Can I ever use violence in face of State violence and injustice, is there such a thing as Just War, Just violence?' I went to the cross and found my answer, 'Love your enemy; Do not kill' and came into my own believe that nonviolence is the way of Jesus, the way of the Cross.



JEF FELIX (BELGIUM)

For me personally the primary source of our spirituality for nonviolence is Jesus Christ and the multitude of people inspired by Him. Active nonviolence is the "weapon" of the powerless and the little ones. The most important contribution here is mental force. The contribution of everybody, women and men, old and young people, sick and healthy is required. Every one of them can help in his or her own way. Here great imagination is highly needed in order to find accurate initiatives in the constant changing situation, because active nonviolence aims at the liberation of the oppressed and the oppressor, the weak and the powerful.

Young Nonviolent Promoters in the DR Congo and Burundi

In a region that has been home to some of Africa's most turbulent conflicts, Pax Christi International worked to develop partnerships with civil society in DR Congo and Burundi fostering dialogue conducive to violence reduction and prevention as well as facilitating tools for nonviolent transformation of conflicts. Pax Christi International trained over 3,300 people in the method of nonviolence in Burundi, Bukavu, Butembo and Uvira. This targeted members of communities such as students and professors, members of religious/cultural groups, and other social and community-based organisations. Each young person trained had to undertake five actions in their local community as an essential part of the multiplying effect of the training. Pax Christi International produced a nonviolence manual that was used as the curriculum for these trainings.

Socio-Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in DR Congo and Burundi

Pax Christi International supported men, women and child soldiers willing to leave irregular military groups in the border region shared by the DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. Using the method of disarmament, demilitarisation and reintegration, the process brought spaces of peace and reconciliation. Pax Christi International worked with local community leaders to reintegrate former combatants and offered economic stimulus participants to open small businesses, for example, the sale of gasoline, raising of small livestock, a cyber café, soap making, among others.

Nonviolent Conflict Transformation in Latin America

The regional network of Pax Christi is training communities in Colombia, Guatemala, Peru, Mexico, Chile and Paraguay experiencing conflict in areas where extractive projects are developed. The program empowers communities in methods of nonviolent conflict transformations and transformational local advocacy as they learn about the implications of extractive projects, about the national legislation under which they operate, but most importantly, about their rights as individuals and communities.



Re-Commitment to Gospel Nonviolence

The Rome conference's final statement appeals to the Catholic Church to re-commit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence and calls on the Church to:

- Continue developing Catholic social teaching on nonviolence. In particular, we call on Pope Francis to share with the world an encyclical on nonviolence and Just Peace;
- Integrate Gospel nonviolence explicitly into the life, including the sacramental life, and work of the Church through dioceses, parishes, agencies, schools, universities, seminaries, religious orders, voluntary associations, and others;
- Promote nonviolent practices and strategies (e.g., nonviolent resistance, restorative justice, trauma healing, unarmed civilian protection, conflict transformation and peacebuilding strategies);
- Initiate a global conversation on nonviolence within the Church, with people of other faiths, and with the larger world to respond to the monumental crises of our time with the vision and strategies of nonviolence and Just Peace;
- No longer use or teach "just war theory"; continue advocating for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons;
- Lift up the prophetic voice of the church to challenge unjust world powers and to support and defend those nonviolent activists whose work for peace and justice put their lives at risk.



In this time of great violence and injustice, we invite people everywhere to join this powerful initiative by:

- Learning more about the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference
- Studying and spreading the appeal
- Reading the background papers
- Studying and practicing Gospel nonviolence
- Getting involved in spreading, integrating and activating Gospel nonviolence in the Church and in your context
- Staying in touch

Please visit www.nonviolencejustpeace.net, where you can find background papers (including the personal reflections), photos and videos of the conference, the final statement, press coverage, the list of participants, and resources on nonviolence.

A Call to Prayer and Solidarity

Holy Spirit, our source of light and strength, we thank you for having inspired the call to peacemakers from all over the world to meet in the dramatic situation of humanity to reconsider our responsibility, to deepen and promote the liberating and healing nonviolence of Jesus.

Merciful God, our Father and Mother, you sent your Son Jesus, our Brother, to reveal through his life and teaching your divine, self-giving Love and so incarnate in our world the power of nonviolence, able to overcome ALL forms of violence and to reconcile humanity in justice and peace.

We confess that for centuries our Church, people of God, has betrayed this central message of the Gospel many times and participated in wars, persecution, oppression, exploitation and discrimination.

Holy Spirit, as we meet as peacemakers, we count on your light and your strength to help revive in the Theology of Peace the nonviolent message of Jesus in which there is no place for violence and to offer to all Christians the arms of peacemaking, pardon and reconciliation.

Holy Spirit, we trust in your light and strength that this Conference may mark a new step for our Church, on its way to becoming a Church of Peace, in the spirit of our Brother Jesus and so respond to the cry of humanity for life in dignity and peace.

This prayer was written especially for the conference by Austrian nonviolence activist and theologian Hildegard Goss-Mayr.

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