Peace as a journey of hope: dialogue, reconciliation and ecological conversion

Pope Francis, with the occasion of the World Day of Peace, has published a message in which he outlines five main lines of reflection to reach the long-awaited world peace.

1. Peace, a journey of hope in the face of obstacles and trial

Peace is a precious good to which all humanity aspires, and hope is the virtue that sets us on our way, that gives us wings, even when the obstacles seem unbeatable.

Humanity bears in the footsteps of the flesh and in the memory the signs of wars, which are becoming increasingly destructive, and whose consequences are mostly suffered by the poorest and weakest. Today, seeds of violence continue to be sown through corruption and exploitation, depriving older people, children, women and men of their dignity and denying them freedom, including religious freedom, solidarity and hope for the future.

Every war is a failure of humanity. It begins with the intolerance of the diversity of others, of selfishness, arrogance, the desire for domination, the hatred that generates destruction and all this together feeds violence. We cannot pretend to maintain stability in the world based on fear of annihilation and destruction. We must seek a true brotherhood based on the recognition of a common origin in God which must be carried out through dialogue and mutual trust.

2. Peace, a journey of listening based on memory, solidarity and fraternity

The Pope mentions in the text the Hibakusha people, survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who keep alive the memory of this horror by witnessing their experience so that these events do not happen again in future generations. But memory must not be nourished only by negative and violent events; it is also necessary to preserve the memory of the heroic acts carried out by people who even in the most destructive scenarios are able to bring acts of solidarity and compassion that give rise to hope.

The world is already tired of empty words, it needs people with a convinced witness, artisans of peace, open to dialogue, seekers of truth, beyond ideologies and different opinions.

Peace is a constant process in time that needs the patient search for truth and justice, that honours the memory of the victims and that opens up to a hope stronger than revenge, safeguarding the rights of all people, especially the weakest and most vulnerable.

3. Peace, a journey of reconciliation in fraternal communion

In the Bible, through the prophets, we are called to establish a covenant of God with humanity: it is a matter of renouncing the desire for domination of some people over others and seeing ourselves as a fraternity, sons and daughters of God. A covenant that makes the strength of forgiveness and reconciliation in all aspects of individual, social and community life spring from our hearts. There will be no true peace if we are not able to build a fairer economic system.

4. Peace, a journey of ecological conversion

"If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve." (LS 200).

For all these reasons, there is an urgent need for an ecological conversion that sets our relations with God, personally, with those around us, with all living beings and with the Earth. The Synod of the Amazon, with its apostolic exhortation Querida Amazonía, calls us to a peaceful relationship between communities and the earth, between the present and the memory, between experiences and hopes.

We are called here as well to listen and contemplate the world that God has given us to make it our common home: natural resources, all forms of life in their diversity and the Earth itself must be cared and preserved. Conversion must be considered in an integral way because it is the consequence of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. This leads us to have a new look at life that transforms all relationships between people, all living beings, creation and with its Creator.

5. “We obtain all that we hope for”

The journey of reconciliation calls for patience and trust. Peace will not be obtained unless it is hoped for. For this we can draw inspiration from God’s love for every being, a liberating love, unlimited, free and endless.

Fear is frequently a source of conflict. The culture of encounter breaks with the culture of threat. It makes each encounter give us the possibility of going beyond our narrow horizons and makes us strive for a universal peace, a fraternity that is the fruit of the one heavenly Father.

ISABEL CUEENCA ANAYA
Secretary-General GCJP
people who work at sea have a high mortality rate due to the precarious conditions, frequent abuses related to both working conditions. Occasions of slavery have been reported as well. Similarly, it is hard to mention the ocean and not remember migrants, who, throughout the ages have taken to the sea to seek better places, either in an attempt to find refuge from persecution, life threats, lack of security or to find better working and living conditions. Growing environmental degradation contributes to an increase in misplaced people.

Proposals for Concerted Action

International level
- Direct measures for the conservation of the oceans, including the designation of marine protected areas (MPAs). At the scientific level, it is recommended to reserve 30% of the seas in a network of MPAs by 2030.
- Establish and respect fishing quotas. In June 2019, sixty-two parties, including the European Union, reached the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, a binding international agreement to combat illegal fishing. The regulations and frameworks seek to maintain the competitiveness of small-scale fisheries and provide them with access to services and markets.
- The international community is responsible for helping those countries that have difficulties in providing waste collection services to their communities.
- We urge governments to apply international laws and conventions, which ensure that the labour rights of people working in the fisheries sector are guaranteed. The authorities must prioritize coastal conservation and fishing practices that respect the environment.

European and national level
- Implement systemic change in our economic model, such as circular economy action plans.
- Ocean clean-up programmes are a shared responsibility that does not fall solely to voluntary organisations. It is also a commitment of government agencies.
- Government’s investment in research and development to further improve the state of the oceans.

Local and individual level
- Schools have a great potential to raise awareness about the conservation of the oceans by incorporating this issue in the design of their educational programs, accompanying it with measures aiming to reduce, recycle, reuse and recover products, promoting the use of biodegradable materials.
- When buying products, choose those that do not use microplastics in the manufacturing process. Do not throw garbage on the shore or in the sea. Young people can emphasize this behaviour in a proactive way during hikes and activities.

The United Nations Decade of Ocean Sciences for Sustainable Development begins in 2021. Let us make it a time when humanity recognized the oceans as a great common good and took action to reverse the harmful effects that our economic systems, technology and lifestyles are having on them. A time when each person, assuming his or her share of responsibility, ensures the protection of the heart of the planet and thus can continue to give us life for generations to come.

2020 Annual Concerted Action of Justice and Peace Europe.

“The forests are the green lung of our planet, but the oceans are its blue heart. Now it’s up to all of us to keep this blue heart beating”. Karmenu Vella

70% of the Earth’s surface is covered with water. Life originated in water and an amazing variety of creatures coexist in it to sustain the web of life as we know it.

Ecological problem
It is estimated that each year 8 million tons of plastic are dumped into the oceans together with 1.5 million tons of microplastics, which are difficult to collect and easily confused as food by marine species. Polluting substances end up in the seas because of the impact of human activity on land, including deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices - e.g. pesticide spills - and industrial waste disposal. Carbon pollution in our atmosphere causes acidification that threatens marine biodiversity. Sewage and agricultural pollution are the main causes of massive eutrophication of the oceans, generating huge dead zones without oxygen, which are increasing every year. Overfishing has also collapsed and depleted entire ecosystems. Deep-sea trawling is causing untold damage to the seabed. These are irresponsible and inefficient practices, capable of eliminating entire ecosystems and possibly undiscovered species. Emissions from shipping currently account for at least 3 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions and could rise to 17 per cent by 2050 if no action is taken.

Humanitarian problem
Pollution and overconsumption are having a direct effect on those people whose survival depends on fishing. Moreover, people who work at sea have a high mortality rate due to the precarious conditions, frequent abuses related to both working conditions. Occasions of slavery have been reported as well. Similarly, it is hard to mention the ocean and not remember migrants, who, throughout the ages have taken to the sea to seek better places, either in an attempt to find refuge from persecution, life threats, lack of security or to find better working and living conditions. Growing environmental degradation contributes to an increase in misplaced people.

The forests are the green lung of our planet, but the oceans are its blue heart.

Technical Secretariat, GC Justice and Peace
Since the beginning, Justice and Peace has supported the celebration of a Congress of the Laity dedicated to the synodality of the Church. This theme was proposed since we conceive a permanently synodal Church, by the participation of those who integrate it in the commitment and in the ecclesial life as well as in the heart of the world and especially with the most vulnerable people.

We participated in the presentation of four experiences: Liaison for Justice, United Church for Decent Work, the Diocesan School of Social Formation of Madrid and the Diocesan Commission of Integral Ecology of Madrid. We are happy of the echo obtained by the four proposals in the final statement.

The Congress began on Friday 14th of February, with the reading of the Message of Pope Francis, which encouraged us to be “the Church of God, which rolls up its sleeves to meet the other, without judging or condemning him, but reaching out to him, to support him, to encourage him, or simply to accompany him in his life”. He encouraged us to avoid “at all costs the "temptations" of the laity within the Church, which can be: clericalism, which is a plague and locks them up in the sacristy, as well as competitiveness and ecclesial careerism, rigidity and negativity”.

Saturday 15th was a day of experiences, divided into four itineraries: the first announcement, the accompaniment, formation processes and presence in public life. Each participant had to choose a program and a line in the morning and another in the afternoon. Each line offered two experiences and a subsequent working group whose conclusions were used for the final statement. Three experiences proposed by Justice and Peace were on the itinerary of presence in public life: Liaison for Justice, Church for Decent Work and the Diocesan Commission for Integral Ecology in Madrid. The other, dedicated to the Diocesan School of Social Formation in Madrid, was within formative processes.

On Sunday 16, the auxiliary bishop of Barcelona, Toni Vadell, and the journalist, Ana Medina, presented excellently the final document of the Congress. They referred to the fact that we are a people on the way out, in a secular and pluralist context, that is sowing seeds and harvesting synodality that is going out to the peripheries, together with those who are poor and suffering, and that is travelling along paths of life and resurrection.

The "Interchurch Group against Trafficking in Persons", of which Justice and Peace is a member, organized a Prayer Vigil with the theme: Together against Trafficking, on February 7th, the eve of the Day established by Pope Francis, timed to coincide with the liturgical day of Saint Josephine Bakhita.

Every year, we organize this Vigil in a different parish in Madrid, with the aim of approaching different communities and encouraging their participation and involvement in the reflection and commitment against this social scourge that affects so many people in the world, including in Spain.

This year we are holding it in the Parish of Olivar, with the church almost full of participants. The materials for its celebration are sent to the different dioceses so that they can be used in similar meetings in their respective territories.

Bakhita was born in the nineteenth century in Sudan, was kidnapped at the age of nine and sold into slavery on several occasions, suffering the humiliation and mistreatment that was evident in the everlasting scars on her back. Bakhita, in her dialect means “lucky” and it was the name imposed on her since she never remembered her original name or place of origin due to the painful experiences she endured since her childhood.

She has become an icon of survival and liberation. She is the model and reference of a process that begins with slavery, like the people of Israel in Egypt, and culminates with the arrival in the Promised Land. She suffered because of a system that authorized and consented to slavery and the subjugation of some people by others. Today, slavery and human trafficking still exist.

This Vigil was divided into seven moments. In each of them, we prayed from the life and experience of Saint Josephine Bakhita and of so many women who today continue to be sold, kidnapped, enslaved, tattooed and freed. First, in her words we listened to facts, emotions, feelings... collected from her diary; then, we listened to a text or the voice of a person who today is going through a moment similar to hers; thirdly, we listened to a biblical text that sheds light on this situation; we responded with a song of supplication and trust and a few moments of silence to interiorize what we had heard and lived.

The Vigil was supported by symbols and signs that shaped the experience that we were interiorizing and updating.
With this title, a meeting on the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was held in Madrid on February 27th, organized by Justice and Peace and the Paul VI Foundation, and attended by the Secretary General and spokesperson of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, Luis Argüello, Carlos Umana, one of ICAN’s international leaders, also participated and made a presentation. An interview with Setsuko Harlow, a survivor of Hiroshima, who was in Madrid at the time but was unable to attend the meeting for health reasons, was screened. Thirty representatives of social entities of the Catholic Church expressed with her attendance the firm commitment of the Church to the “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons” (TPNW), ratified by 35 countries and which needs 50 signatures for its entry into force. Various possibilities for action were discussed within the framework of ICAN, which already has 547 participating organizations. Examples of actions are the motions in City Councils, already carried out in Zaragoza, Cadiz, Ferrol, La Coruña and Barcelona, as well as awareness and sensitization activities at all levels in which the connections between integral disarmament and integral development are highlighted, under the idea that “everything is connected”, so insistently repeated by Pope Francis, who has shown a firm commitment to the TPNW.

Towards a world free of nuclear weapons

The UPR is a mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council that assesses every five years the progress of each of its 193 Member States on fundamental guarantees. Spain received 275 recommendations for improvement in human rights on January 22nd. Other recommendations include the effective implementation of policies that guarantee access to means of compensation and protection for victims of violence against women, including other forms of gender violence in the organic law; intensifying efforts to integrate people with disabilities into society and eliminate all obstacles that limit them, as well as guaranteeing the accessibility and availability of health services; ensuring the reception and integration of migrants and refugees by protecting and promoting the rights of victims of human trafficking; strengthen policies to fight unemployment and promote decent employment, especially among young people and the Roma population; adopt measures to extend pension coverage; support access to housing for vulnerable families; initiate constructive dialogue between the new Government and the Catalan people and its institutions; abolish the system of incommunicado detention and solitary confinement for more than 15 days; and ensure the right to truth, justice and reparation for the victims of the civil war.

The current mobility and energy model has been the last topic of reflection of the campaign if you take care of the planet, you fight poverty. The quality of life in cities has much to do with systems of transport, which are often a source of much suffering for those who use them. Many cars, used by one or more people, circulate in cities, causing traffic congestion, raising the level of pollution, and consuming enormous quantities of non-renewable energy. This makes it necessary to build more roads and parking areas which spoil the urban landscape. Many specialists agree on the need to give priority to public transportation. Yet some measures needed will not prove easily acceptable to society unless substantial improvements are made in the systems themselves, which in many cities force people to put up with undignified conditions due to crowding, inconvenience, infrequent service and lack of safety. [LS, 153] The planetary energy system is still dependent on non-renewable fossil fuels that contribute to climate change. Their management, in the hands of large corporations, leaves millions of people around the world without access to forms of energy, such as electricity and the technologies that use it, contributing in a significant way to poverty and inequality.

Political situation in Togo

In November we received a visit from a member of the Togo Focus’ association who shared with the General Commission for Justice and Peace the complicated situation of his country and the difficulties in holding free and democratic elections. For two and a half years, attempts to bring a democratic change in the country have been repressed and distorted; mass demonstrations have been marked by violations of rights and freedoms; the legislative elections of December 20th 2018 were boycotted; a constitutional reform and numerous laws in 2019 gave impunity to the president of the republic; the municipal elections of June 2019 were dysfunctional and flawed because the municipal councils were replaced by a local council with councillors appointed by the president. All this led to the presidential elections of February 22nd, 2020, which perpetuated the 53-year-old Nassingbé dynasty in office. One more electoral farce in a long series of rigged presidential elections (1993, 1998, 2003, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020) since the beginning of Togo’s democratization attempt in 1991. As far as the rest of West Africa is concerned, since 2019, there is a trend towards the regression of the rule of law in other countries, in particular Benin, Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea-Conakry.

Spanish Commission for Justice and Peace
Rafael de Riego, 16, 3º dcha. - 28045 Madrid
Tel. (+34) 91 506 18 28
juspax@juspax-es.org • www.juspax-es.org/en/
IBAN ES73 1491 0001 2110 3434 7912
Depósito legal: M-24725-1987

General Commission for Justice and Peace is member of

Triodos Bank
Make your money make a difference

General Commission for Justice and Peace in Spain is an ecclesiastical body created by the Episcopal Conference with the mission of promoting and defending human rights, justice and peace. It is a member of the Conference of Commissions for Justice and Peace (ECJ) of the Union of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (UECE), and of the Commission for Justice and Peace of the Episcopal Conference of the United Nations (CEPNU). It is also a member of the European Council of Churches (ECC), the Permanent Council of the Conference of European Churches (PCEC), the General Commission for Justice and Peace in Europe (CGJIPE) and the Forum Laity; member of the Federation of Defense and Promotion of Human Rights of Spain (FIDPAH) with special consultative status with the Economic and Social Committee of the United Nations; Coordinator of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN); and the Platform for International Cooperation for Immigrants (PICUM).