

Pax Christi to lead protests at London's weapons fair

An international Catholic peace movement, together with other faith groups, is preparing to demonstrate against Europe's largest arms fair.

In advance of the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair, which is set to take place in London next month, members of Pax Christi will join people from other faith communities in declaring their objection to the weapons trade.

As arms companies begin setting up their merchandise at the fair, diverse faith groups will gather at the ExCel Centre, London, on Tuesday 3rd September to declare with a united voice that they have 'No Faith in War'.

The fair will take place at the ExCel Centre, East London, between 10th and 13th September and peace groups have planned a number of demonstrations against the event.

Pax Christi said the arms trade represents business interests being given greater status than the lives of human beings. In a statement it said: 'Our government has continued to support the sale of weapons for profit despite the certain knowledge that these weapons will be used, for example,

by the Saudi Arabian government to kill Yemeni civilians. This structure of violence is challenged by people of faith who do not accept that violent means truly resolve conflicts.'

Pax Christi members will hold a procession using an adapted Stations of the Cross liturgy as part of their protest.

A woman who attended her first No Faith in War day last time commented, "I felt apprehensive. I wasn't sure what to expect. But everyone was so welcoming. The atmosphere of being with like-minded people who want peace was really wonderful."

The UK government invites official delegations to attend DSEI. While the list will not be published until closer to the time, in 2017, 56 official delegations were invited, including representatives of Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, Bahrain, Turkey, UAE and Colombia. Despite a recent ban in arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the country has been invited to DSEI 2019.

Public polling in 2017 found that 76 per cent of the UK opposes arms exports to human rights abusing regimes.



Demonstrators pictured outside the 2017 event at the ExCel, London. Photo: Peter Marshall/Zuma Press/PA

Seminary priest jailed for 'appalling record of abuse'

A priest who sexually abused schoolboys at a Catholic seminary in the 1970s and 1980s in a "quite appalling way" has been jailed for 18 years.

Fr Michael Higginbottom targeted two children while they boarded at St Joseph's College in Upholland, Lancashire.

During a two-week trial at Burnley Crown Court, jurors heard that he "regularly, systematically and horrifically" abused the boys, with prosecutor David Temkin saying: "They were threatened with violence and struck with a strap or a belt."

After being convicted of five counts of buggery and seven of indecent assault, 76-year-old Higginbottom was jailed for 18 years, half in prison and half on licence.

Judge Andrew Woolman told him: "You were in the highest position of trust in relation to these boys, who you abused in a quite appalling way."

"I have no doubt that you specifically targeted these boys."

"These acts were accompanied, time after time, by threats or actual violence under the guise of a normal school punishment."



An RAF Chinook helicopter flies in sandbags for a second day as they continue to try and stop any further collapse of the dam at Toddbrook reservoir. Photo: Peter Byrne/PA

Priest admits fears after raising alarm over cracked dam

An Old Catholic priest who first told the council that Whaley Bridge residents must be evacuated after he witnessed cracks appear in the dam at Toddbrook reservoir said he had hardly slept for three days.

Fr Jamie MacLeod, who lives in the small Derbyshire town, has been spending his time taking supplies to the emergency workers, the BBC reported.

Fr MacLeod raised the alarm last Thursday when he went to check the dam after a few days of heavy rain.

"When I was over there it started to crack," he said. "When it got worse I went over to the council and raised the alarm and said, 'We have to evacuate the village,'" he told the BBC.

"We then went back to the reservoir and, of course, the police then came and procedures were put in place."

"At the time I really thought the village was going to go."

"Then it really struck me there is a school at the bottom of the dam and last week that playground was

full."

As the *Catholic Universe* went to press, emergency work to prevent the damaged dam from bursting was continuing, as a small number of residents refusing to evacuate their homes were being criticised for putting lives at risk.

Fr MacLeod said: "Everybody's frightened and shocked."

"We had an ecumenical vigil last night and it was calm and peaceful. We had prayers and people lit candles and gave each other support."



Michael Higginbottom. Photo: Lancs Police/PA