Our hearts cry out!

The year 2014 was marked as a period of numerous violent conflicts and displacement of populations. A hundred years after the beginning of the First World War, it seems that our world is not able to effectively protect people and prevent the outbreak of violent conflict and wars.

Our hearts cry out when we see innocent people and vulnerable groups - including persons with disabilities, pregnant women, children, elderly persons, killed in violent conflicts: Gaza, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Libya, Mali, Central African Republic, Ukraine and elsewhere. Our hearts cry out when violence is used as a justification for more violence, while the innocent lie dead, wounded or homeless.

Every day seems to bring more bad news as instability rages on. Unfolding events in countries such as Nigeria (with the abduction by the Boko Haram group of over 200 girls) as well as in Syria and Iraq (with sectarian tensions leading to killing fields) provide high profile examples of what happens on a daily basis in terms of discrimination.

Tragically, all too often religion is being misused in these situations. All too often, religion is a “victim” of the cynical efforts designed to demonise the other. Hate speech and demonising the other cannot be accepted. The name of religion has been invoked to justify the murder of ordinary people. People of faith are using their religion as a source of strength to resist the great pressures to demonise people of other faiths. Indeed, ways need to be found to reach out in solidarity for peace.

Faith based organisations, such as Pax Christi, dedicate their energy in bridging the divides that so painfully separate communities. Communities must be peacemakers. Sectarian violence needs to be rejected and dialogue promoted. We need to keep the respect of human dignity and the standards of “the right to freedom” as high as possible and that should be enjoyed by people of all faiths and beliefs.

Radical extremists like the so called ISIS must be defeated since the application of such ideologies is decidedly evil. But that will not happen with brute force - even if in some cases it may be necessary. Transparent and legitimate political solutions have to be actively pursued and enacted.

Roughly 40% of the 300 million residents of the Arab world are in abject poverty today. In addition, the region suffers from high unemployment levels and a breakdown of trust in rulers and governmental institutions. In other words, there must be a political process that addresses the root causes of the instability and a political framework is needed to solve the crisis in the Middle East.

Civil society must also play its role by implementing the so called “track 2 dialogue.” That means: investing in dialogue and in cross border contacts with key players within all the groups and parties involved in the conflict: academics, peace and human rights activists, social organisations, church leaders, etc. This is diplomacy from below.

I believe that there is a potential for religious actors to be peacemakers. They have the capacity to provide solutions to conflicts. Religious institutions are capable of significant social mobilisation, in addition to a distinct moral standing. Politically speaking, religious institutions are either part of or stand in direct opposition to ruling regimes in many parts of the world. In my opinion, churches and religions should always be in a position of “critical distinction” when it comes to the political realities.

The fundamental teachings of religion include concern for peace, actions for social justice, and caring for the poor and marginalised. Blessed are the peacemakers, God shall call them his sons and daughters.

Fr. Paul Lansu
Senior Policy Advisor Pax Christi International
Focus on nuclear weapons
- ‘Rethink Trident’ is an invitation and petition supported by Pax Christi. Approach local religious leaders, colleagues in education, medicine, politics, and all the other professions, and ask the question: Do they agree that the government should scrap plans to spend over £100 billion replacing Trident with a new generation of nuclear weapons? If they do, sign up! http://act.rethinktrident.org.uk/petition/1
- Monday 2nd March Lockdown at AWE Burghfield, near Reading. Pax Christi is helping to co-ordinate a faith presence at this national event to peacefully disrupt government plans for the renewal of Trident. Full briefing available on our website or from the office. Tell us if you would like to attend or help on the day.
- There are two up-coming Trident events in Scotland: on Saturday 28th March, a demonstration in Glasgow and on Monday 13th April a blockade at Faslane Naval Base. http://scraptrident.org/
- 6th and 9th August will be the 70th anniversary of the first use of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Pax Christi will keep vigil as usual at Westminster Cathedral and is supporting a special interfaith assembly at Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 during the afternoon of Thursday 6th August.

Focus on Israel & Palestine
- The Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine and Israel (WWPPI), between 20th-26th September, provides an opportunity to host a prayer service, vigil, speaker event in your parish or community on the current situation. Pax Christi is a member of WWPPI and will be producing worship materials which will be available on our website.
- Become a Kairos Community. Pax Christi is a member of Kairos Britain and Kairos Palestine and we invite groups and parishes to become ‘Kairos Communities’ as a way of showing commitment to peace with justice for Israel & Palestine. You would need to show that you are engaged in prayer, awareness raising and action. Pax Christi can help you in this process. Find out more here http://www.kairosbritain.org.uk/news_kairos_communities_59710.aspx

Focus on welfare not warfare
- Plan an event for Monday 13th April - the Global Day of Action on Military Spending. Use imagination and humour to bring the skewed reality of global expenditure to public and press attention. Look out for GDAMS material available from Pax Christi and Campaign Against the Arms Trade. http://demilitarize.org.uk/
- With a general election coming up, raise this issue whenever cuts to services (hospitals, libraries, police, transport etc.) Challenge prospective parliamentary candidates, write to local papers. Our own election briefing will be on the website soon.
- Look at Give Peace a Budget - 7 ways to spend $1.7 trillion - a short film made by Pax Christi that suggests how we could invest in people and their needs rather than in war and conflict. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBG8li5SMJw. Show it to a parish group/class/etc. (It can also be purchased as a DVD with discussion notes for £5.00)
- Conscience - Taxes for Peace not War - is launching a public consultation on a draft ‘Peace Tax Bill’. Ask your MP to sign the Early Day Motion and back the bill which will enable conscientious objectors to military taxation to have the military portion of their taxes directed to more peaceful activities. This would extend the right to conscientious objection won 100 years ago in the Military Service Act of 1916. For more information email Shaughan Dolan: campaign@conscienceonline.org.uk

Focus on militarism and climate change
- April 2015 is the centenary of the International Women’s Congress held in The Hague, and founding of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). WILPF is holding an international conference and exhibition in The Hague from 27th-29th April which is open to everyone. http://www.womenstopwar.org/conference-home/
- Celebrate women peacemakers with a few friends at home, or join Pax Christi at a celebration conference on Saturday 26th September. Venue to be confirmed.
- Start planning an event with others in your area for CO Day 2016, which will mark the introduction of conscription and witness of 20,000 pioneer British conscientious objectors of the First World War. There were about 100 Catholic COs whom we would like to research. Tell us if you, or some of your students, could help with this project. The image below is of a banner which you can borrow for local events. Available from the office with small handling charge.
- 2015 also marks 70 years since Pax Christi was founded at the end of the Second World War. Join us for our AGM in London on 6th June to celebrate our work at home and internationally, and meet those receiving our Peace Award. British Pax Christi will also get together with the German, French and Flemish sections, for a Pilgrimage of Peace in Flanders between 29th-31st October. Contact us if you would like more details about either of these gatherings.

Focus on remembering war resisters and peacemakers
- The UN Conference on Climate will take place in Paris in December and in preparation Pax Christi is supporting Westminster Diocesan JBP commission and others in a programme of prayer and fasting for climate and a Pilgrimage for the Planet. Vigils on the 1st of every month will take place in and around London until December. Two stages of a cycling pilgrimage from London to Paris are planned - one on bank holiday weekend 28th-31st August, the other in the first week of December. Full programme and ways of participating will be on our website.
- Use the DVD Conflict and Climate Change, produced by the Movement for the Abolition of War. It comes with a study guide with background, questions and additional resources on the links between war, conflict and climate change. Available from MAW for £9.00. http://www.abolishwar.org.uk/store/c2/DVDs.html
- Connections between poverty, climate change and war will be examined at this year’s national Justice and Peace conference from 17th-19th July, The Things that Make for Peace. Join activists from round the country for this energising weekend held at Swanwick, Derbyshire. Pax Christi is one of the organisers and further details will be available soon.

Focus on the things that make for peace
- October 27th-29th April which is open to everyone. http://www.womenstopwar.org/conference-home/
- Celebrate women peacemakers with a few friends at home, or join Pax Christi at a celebration conference on Saturday 26th September. Venue to be confirmed.
- Start planning an event with others in your area for CO Day 2016, which will mark the introduction of conscription and witness of 20,000 pioneer British conscientious objectors of the First World War. There were about 100 Catholic COs whom we would like to research. Tell us if you, or some of your students, could help with this project. The image below is of a banner which you can borrow for local events. Available from the office with small handling charge.
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2015 - Campaigners’ Calendar
Diary


18 February - Ash Wednesday London: Annual liturgy of Repentance & Resistance at Ministry of Defence, Whitehall, London. Starts at 3.00pm. See website for more detail.

Liverpool: Begins at 11.45am at Bold Street, processing through the city centre to the Law Courts. Organised by Pax Christi Liverpool. Contact Jan Harper: janharper1@yahoo.co.uk

19 February, London Network for Peace Annual General Meeting and planning meeting for future World War I peace events. Friends House, Euston Road, London at 1.30pm.

21 March, London Ecumenical service to mark 35th anniversary of martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Preacher Cardinal Vincent Nichols. 11.00am St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ.

11-12 April, Garforth, Leeds Hope for the World: weekend with John Bell. A weekend of words and music exploring the joy of the Gospel... and as it is John Bell people can expect peace and justice issues to feature prominently.

25 April, Aylesford, Kent Southwark Diocese JPJ Spring Assembly on the theme From prayer to action and back again. With facilitators from CAFOD, London Citizens, JRS, Progressio and Columban JPIC. 10.30 - 4.00 New Barn, Aylesford Priory, Kend. More info www.southwarkjandp.co.uk

6 June, London Pax Christi’s Annual General Meeting will be held in Pimlico, London for the whole day. Put the date in your diary now, always a great gathering and this year will include the Pax Christi Peace Award.

News from the office

Advent Peace Service
Our Annual Advent Peace Service attracted more people than ever and raised £800 shared between Pax Christi and the Jesuit Refugee Service, Syria. At the Christmas Market we sold more than £470 worth of Palestinian goods and Christmas cards and other stalls, including JRS, Women at the Well, Traidcraft reported good sales too.

You can read more about the evening in this report from the Sisters of Mercy (Institute) who helped with the service and the market. http://bit.ly/1uidfJt

Peace Sunday
A great response leading up to Peace Sunday this year with 146 orders for resources (compared with 116 last year). A special thank-you to all our members who have helped to promote Peace Sunday and all those who have helped make Peace Sunday known in their own parishes. We sold out of promo Peace Sunday and all those who have helped make peace Sunday known in their own parishes. We sold out of peace Sunday known in their own parishes. We sold out of peace Sunday the Pope Francis prayer cards. Please feel free to get in touch to tell us about your own Peace Sunday initiatives and feedback! orders@paxchristi.org.uk

New members
In November 2013 when we sat around to discuss our work plan for 2014 we set ourselves a target of getting 48 new members. We are delighted that we have ended 2014 with 102 new members! It is of great strength and encouragement for us in the office as more and more people join Pax Christi with the commitment of working together for Peace. Thanks for helping to make this possible.

Members’ News
We now have a page on the website dedicated to news of what you as members have done. It is a great way of sharing good ideas, photographs, liturgy ideas and so on. Do take a look http://paxchristi.org.uk/news-and-events/members-news-2015/ and remember to send in short reports of your events or projects to coordinator@paxchristi.org.uk

The Pax Christi UK Peace Award
Since 2001, every other year, Pax Christi members sent in nominations for this award. Over that time 28 people have received the award, the Neve Shalom-Wahat al Salam medal. Some of these represent groups or organisations, others have received the award in as individuals. They do not have to be Pax Christi members but they do have to be grass-roots peacemakers whose work may not be recognised in other ways.

We will make the presentation again in at our AGM in London on 6th June. The Award Group needs Pax Christi members to send in nominations to them by the 31st March 2015. Each nomination should be accompanied by two references and may be sent to the Hendon office. No need to wait until the deadline, we are ready to receive nominations now.

Arn Dekker on behalf of the Award Group

Follow Pax Christi on twitter: https://twitter.com/paxchristiuk and http://www.twitter.com/PaxChristiYouth

Pax Christi — Our Values
Pax Christi members live by the biblically inspired values of Peace, Reconciliation, Nonviolence.

These values are supported by the witness of peacemakers down the ages and the experience of the Pax Christi community.

Pax Christi is rooted in Catholic Christianity but is open to all who are in sympathy with its values and work.

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