

International Delegation to Syria

Report by MAIREAD MAGUIRE

After a ten-day visit to Lebanon and Syria, leading a 16 person delegation from 8 countries, invited by Musalaha Reconciliation Movement, I have returned hopeful that peace is possible in Syria, if all outside interference is stopped and the Syrians are allowed to solve their own problems upholding their right to self-determination.

An appeal to end all violence and for Syrians to be left alone from outside interference was made by all those we met during our visit to Syria. We have tried to forward it to the International community in our Concluding Declaration.

During our visit we went to refugee camps, affected communities, met religious leaders, combatants, government representatives, opposition delegations and many others, perpetrators and victims, in Lebanon and Syria.

Visits to refugee camps

In Lebanon we visited several refugee camps, hosted by Lebanese or Palestinian communities. One woman said: "before this conflict started we were happy and had a good life (there is free education, free healthcare, subsidies for fuel, in Syria) and now we live in poverty".

Her daughter and son-in-law (a pharmacist and engineer) standing on a cement floor in a Palestinian refugee camp told us that this violence had erupted to everyone's surprise and spread so quickly they were all still in shock.

Religious and government leaders have called upon people not to flee Syria and it is to be hoped many will heed this call, as after seeing so many Syrian refugees living in tents and being exploited in so many ways, including sexually.

I believe the best solution is to stabilise Syria so its people feel safe enough to stay in the country. If refugees continue to flee Syria then surrounding countries could be destabilized, causing the domino effect and destabilizing the entire Middle East.

Many people have fled into camps in surrounding countries like Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon, all of whom are trying to manage the huge influx of Syrian refugees. Although the host countries are doing their best to cope, they are overwhelmed by refugee numbers. (UNHCR's official estimate is one million .

Through our meetings we have been informed that Turkey invites Syrian refugees into the country and forbid them to go back home. It is documented that Syrian refugees in Turkey and Jordan are mistreated. Some young Syrian refugee girls are sold for forced marriage in Jordan. From OHCHR reports we know that more than 4 million Syrians are displaced inside their own country, living in great need.

A representative from Red Cross, told us that there is freedom to do their work throughout Syria for all NGOs and the Syrian Red crescent.

In co-ordination with the

Ministry of Social affairs and under such dire circumstances, they are doing their best, providing services to as many people as possible. However, there is a great shortage of funds for them to cope with this humanitarian tragedy of refugees and internally displaced population.

The economic sanctions, as in Iraq, are causing great hardship to many people and all those whom we met called for them to be lifted.

Hospitals

We visited the hospitals and saw many people injured by shootings, bombings, and armed attacks. A moderate Sunni Imam told me how he was abducted by jihadists, who tortured him, cut off his ear, tried to cut his

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DISARMING

A quarterly journal of Pax Christi Australia. It aims to provide members and interested peacemakers with peace news and views both local and international. We endeavour in each edition to reflect the three-fold emphasis of Pax Christi which engages members in study, non-violent action and prayer for peace, justice, human rights, development and inter-faith and inter-civilisation dialogue.

PAX CHRISTI AUSTRALIA

is an Australia-wide

Christian Peace Movement, affiliated with Pax Christi International.

Human rights, justice and integrity of creation are central to its work.

We take a stand against militarism, nuclear weapons and the arms race.

As an ecumenical Christian movement Pax Christi fosters the spiritual and scriptural dimensions of peace-making.

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Bruce Kent Writes to Pope Francis I



Dear Pope Francis,

Whether this letter will ever reach you I have no idea, but it is worth trying to contact you. As an ordinary Catholic I wish you well in the great task to which you have been called. You are in the prayers of millions who need your leadership in this, our poverty and war-torn world.

I am a Vice-President of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and of Pax Christi

UK which has done its best over many years to promote Papal teaching on peace. Over 50 years ago I was inspired to start on this work when I heard another member of the Society of Jesus, Archbishop Thomas Roberts SJ, makes it clear that nuclear weapons involve immoral actions: the destruction of thousands of innocent people and a willingness to perform such acts in given circumstances.

For years we have heard, ever since the signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968, that the political goal is the elimination of all nuclear weapons everywhere. But the actions of the major nuclear weapon states point in a very different direction. The UN representative to the Holy See said in 1997 that '*Nuclear weapons are incompatible with the peace we seek for the 21st century... They deserve condemnation. The preservation of the Non Proliferation Treaty demands an unequivocal commitment to their abolition.*' Today there is no such commitment. In various ways major nuclear weapon states are 'improving' their nuclear arsenals. While from politicians there are vague expressions of hope for a nuclear-free world, in practice all of the major nuclear weapons states - except perhaps China - are refusing to negotiate nuclear weapon abolition. This is to ignore the call from the International Court of Justice in 1996 to negotiate abolition 'in good faith'.

In Britain the Government is planning to spend £100,000,000,000 on building and maintaining another generation of nuclear weapons to replace our current Trident system. This will ensure that we British are nuclear weapon armed for at least another 50 years. This massive sum of money is, to use the phrase of President Eisenhower in 1953, 'a theft from those who hunger and are not fed'. It also makes nonsense of any British commitment to rid ourselves and the world of nuclear weapons. Meanwhile our Government tells non-nuclear countries that they cannot have the 'security' which we claim for ourselves.

So far in Britain the Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed Churches and the Society of Friends have made clear their opposition to this planned new generation of nuclear weapons. So have the Catholic Bishops of Scotland. The Church of England and the Catholic Church in England and Wales have not yet given a collective view on this replacement of Trident. Our Catholic Bishops in 2006 did urge the Government to decommission British nuclear weapons. That call was not heeded.

It would help the worldwide Church if you were to give us your own views. There is a consistent Catholic opposition to nuclear weapons of mass destruction that goes back to Pope John's *Pacem in Terris* but which now needs restating. Holy Father, please speak to the world about the elimination of war and all weapons of mass destruction. The human race can and should live in peace, free from the threat of weapons of mass destruction which, as a result of accident and misunderstanding, have several times brought us close to disaster in the recent past.

Sincerely and respectfully, Bruce Kent

7 May 2013

Delegation to Syria contd.

tried to cut his throat, slicing his legs, and left him for dead. He said when he goes back to his mosque they will slaughter him. He told us: "these men are foreign fighters, jihadists from foreign countries, well armed, well trained, with money, they are in our country to destroy it. They are not true Muslims but are religious extremist/fundamentalists terrorizing, abducting, killing our people".

The government spokesman also confirmed that they have in detention foreign fighters from 29 countries, including Chechens, Iraqis, and many others.

Meeting with Opposition

Our delegation participated in an open forum with many representatives of internal opposition parties. One political opponent who was in prison 24 years under the Assad regime, and has been out for 11 years, wants political change as do 20 other internal opposition groups, but without outside interference and the use of violence.

We met with 'armed' opposition people in a local community who said they had accepted the government's offer of amnesty and were working for a peaceful way forward. One man told me he had accepted money from Jihadists to fight but had been shocked by their cruelty and the way they treated fellow Syrian Muslims considering them as not real Muslims. He said foreign Jihadists wanted to take over Syria, not save it.

A part of our delegation headed to Homs, invited by the opposition community of Al Waar city where displaced families from Baba Amro, Khalidiyeh and other rebel strongholds seek refuge. The Delegation saw all the conditions of this city and is studying a Pilot Project for Reconciliation and peaceful reintegration between this community and the surrounded non rebel communities (Shia and Alaouites) with whom 15 days ago an agreement of non belligerence was signed through the auspices of Mussalaha.

Meeting with Officials

Our Delegation met, and spoke, at the Parliament, and also with the Governor, Prime Minister and 7 other Ministries. We were given details of the

new Constitution and political reforms being put in place, and plans for elections in 2014. Government Ministers admitted they had made mistakes in being slow to respond to legitimate demands for change from civil society but these were now being addressed...

When we enquired from the Prime Minister regarding the allegation that the Syrian Government had used Sarin gas, he told us that as soon as news came from Aleppo that allegedly gas had been used, his government invited immediately the UN to come into investigate, but heard nothing from them. Most recently however, a UN investigator, High Commissioner Carla Del Ponte, has confirmed that it was rebels, not Syrian government, who used Sarin gas.

During a meeting with Justice Minister, we requested that a list of 72 non-violent political dissidents currently detained be released. The justice Minister said after checking those listed were indeed non-violent political dissidents, he would, in principle, agree to the release of these non-violent detainees.

He also informed us they do not implement the death penalty and it is hoped that when things settle in Syria they will move to have the death penalty abolished. We also asked the Justice Minister (an international lawyer) about Syrian Government's Human rights abuses, namely the artillery shelling into no-go areas being held by jihadists and armed opposition. The Minister accepted those facts but alleged that the Government had a duty to clear these areas. We suggested there was a better way to deal with the problem than artillery shelling but he insisted that the government had responsibility to clear the areas of rebel forces and this was the way in which they were doing it. . .

Meeting with religious leaders

We attended in the Omayyad Mosque in Damascus a prayer gathering led by the Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic, Dr. Ahmad Badr Al-Din Hassoun and the Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregory III Laham with the delegate of Greek Orthodox Patriarch John X Yazigi, and clerics of all traditions.

The Assembly prayed for the peace and unity of Syria and the non-

interference of outsiders in their country. They stressed the conflict in Syria is not a religious conflict, as Muslims and Christians have always lived together in Syria, and they are,(in spite of living with suffering and violence much of which is not of their own making), unified in their wish to be a light of peace and reconciliation to the world. The Patriarch said that from the Mosque and Christian churches goes out a great movement of peace and reconciliation and asked both those inside and outside Syria, to reject all violence and support the people of Syria in this work of dialogue, reconciliation and peacemaking. . .

An Overview

Following many authorized reports in the mainstream media and our own [findings] I can stress that the Syrian State and its population are under a proxy war led by foreign countries and directly financed and backed mainly by Qatar. . .

Turkey, a part of the Lebanese opposition and some of the Jordan authorities offer a safe haven to a diversity of jihadist groups, each with its own agenda, recruited from many countries. Bands of jihadists armed and financed from foreign countries invade Syria through Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon porous frontiers in an effort to destabilize Syria.

There are an estimated 50,000 foreign jihadist fighters terrorizing Syria. Those death squads are destroying systematically the Syrian State infrastructures (Electricity, Oil, Gas and water plants, High Tension Pylons, hospitals, schools, public buildings, cultural heritage sites and even religious sanctuaries). . .

It is well documented that many of those terrorists are permanently under stimulant like Captagon. The general lack of security unleashes the terrible phenomenon of abduction for ransoms or for political pressure. Thousands of innocents are missing, among them the two Bishops, Youhanna Ibrahim and Paul Yazigi, many priests and Imams.

UN and EU economic sanctions as well as a severe embargo are pushing Syria to the edge of social collapse. Unfortunately the international media network is ignoring those realities and is bent on demonising,

lying, destabilising the country and fuelling more violence and contradiction.

Conclusion

During our visit to Syria, our delegation was met with great kindness by everyone and I offer to each one who facilitated or hosted our Delegation my most sincere feelings of gratitude. The Syrian people have suffered very deeply and continue to do so. . .

Many are still stunned by the horrors and suddenness of this violence and worried their country will be attacked and divided by outside forces, and are aware that geopolitical forces are at work to destabilize Syria for political control, oil and resources.

One Druze leader said ‘if westerns want our oil – both Lebanon and Syria have oil reserves – let us negotiate for it, but do not destroy our country to take it’ . . .

The greatest hope we took was from Mussalaha, a non political movement from all sections of Syrian society, who have working teams throughout Syria.

Mussalaha mediates between armed gunmen and security forces, helps get release of many people who have been abducted, and brings together all parties to the conflict for dialogue and practical solutions. It was this movement who hosted us, under the leadership of Mother Agnès-Mariam, Superior of Saint James’ Monastery, supported by the Patriarch Gregory III Laham, head of the Catholic Hierarchy of Syria.

This great civil community movement building a peace process and National Reconciliation from the ground up, will, if given space, time, and non-interference from outside, help bring peace to Syria.

I support this “national reconciliation” process which, many Syrian believe, is the only way to bring Peace to SYRIA and the entire Middle East.

This is an edited version of the report prepared by Nobel Peace Laureate, Mairead Maguire. Though Pax Christi Australia has no independent means of verifying the findings of the delegation, it believes its assessment offers a useful counterpoint to the picture painted by our mainstream media.



A Joint Appeal to Sunnis and Shi’as

By S. Muhammad Khatami and Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad

We, the undersigned, are greatly saddened by the violence and bloodshed which have characterised Sunni-Shi’a relations over time. Thousands have been killed in feuds between the two, mostly in certain Muslim countries. It is tragic that many innocent women and children have been among the victims.

Sunni-Shi’a animosity and antagonism have clearly weakened the Muslim ummah. It has made us more vulnerable to the manipulations and machinations of outside elements determined to subvert the unity and integrity of the ummah. It has allowed those who seek to establish their hegemonic power over us to succeed in their objectives.

It is indisputable that Sunni-Shi’a antagonism and conflicts which have resulted in massacres have tarnished the image and dignity of the ummah in the eyes of the world. Few other occurrences in recent times have had such a negative impact.

We appeal to all Sunnis and Shi’as, bound as we are by the same faith in Allah, guided by the same Noble Quran, honouring the same last Messenger of Allah, and facing the same Kiblah, to desist from massacring and killing one another immediately.

NO MORE VIOLENCE

NO MORE BLOODSHED

NO MORE KILLINGS

The two of us – a former Prime Minister from a Sunni majority state, and a former President from an overwhelmingly Shi’a nation – also address this appeal to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) which represents all Muslims of whatever sect or doctrine. The OIC could perhaps set up a task force that will examine the Sunni-Shi’a divide in depth and submit concrete proposals for the political and religious leaders of the ummah to act upon.

We also appeal to sincere, concerned individuals and civil society groups from all over the world to join in this endeavour to stop the violence and bloodshed and to promote peace and understanding between Sunnis and Shi’as.

This joint appeal will be widely circulated mainly through the online media. We shall follow up on this appeal with other activities and programmes.

May Allah Subhanahuwataala guide us in all our humble efforts to serve Him.

S. Muhammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1997-2005)

Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, (1981-2003)

22 May 2013

Father Tissa Balasuriya's struggle for social justice

By Lionel and Chitra Bopage



We heard the sad news that the internationally acclaimed Sri Lankan catholic priest and theologian Father Tissa Balasuriya (Fr Tissa) has passed away.

His exertions on the Catholic Church about the nature of Jesus Christ and his teachings, and how to adjust to the realities of life in the developing world are not well known.

Nevertheless, he became famous internationally when he was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1997 for the book he authored, *Mary and Human Liberation*, which took a feminist perspective on her life. . .

Obviously, his dynamic interpretation of the mother of Jesus was quite different from the traditional interpretation. There was intense international pressure from within and without the Catholic Church to rescind the excommunication.

Fr Tissa did not admit to doctrinal error, but acknowledged perceptions of error, for the sake of a compromise. After a week-long negotiation, the excommunication was rescinded in 1998.

Fr Tissa took progressive initiatives relating to various issues that prevailed in Sri Lanka. He was one of the most respected and the humblest of priests who endeavoured to practise Christianity by his personal commitment and example.

He donated his 80-acre ancestral property and home at Andi Ambalama to establish a Farm and Training Centre for street children. It was set up as a self-sustained community, and commenced its work in 1990. Fr. Tissa donated his ancestral home in Katuwapitiya to the Centre for Society and Religion. He was also instrumental in running another home for boys in Battaramulla, Sri Lanka.

Being a critic of the iniquities of the

photo courtesy the late [Fr. Tissa's blog](#) global capitalist system, he sought to reconcile the teachings of Christ with the global quest for social justice. He was well known for his track record in defending human rights. He won the prestigious Khan Gold Medal when he graduated in economics. He entered the Novitiate in the same year and was ordained a priest in Rome in 1949.

As an economist, he became convinced of the need for economic justice for working people and became a strong advocate and lobbyist for social justice and equity. He was strongly opposed to neo-liberal economic policies and crony capitalism. .

He provided leadership for coordinating inter-religious and inter-racial activities with the aim of working towards achieving social justice, freedom and lasting peace in Sri Lanka. Fr Tissa founded the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR) in 1971 for the study of the burgeoning social, economic and political problems of Sri Lanka. He also established the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians in 1975. In the process, Fr. Tissa was misinterpreted both by sections of the Church and by the ruling elites.

Father Tissa is/was a good friend to both of us. Chitra used to work for the Centre for Society and Religion under the guidance of Fr Tissa, with the aim of trying to assist those families who lived in the slum areas of Colombo. She studied at Aquinas University College where Fr Tissa was Rector. My first contact with him occurred in 1978, when I was presiding over a public May Day rally held by the JVP at the Town Hall in Colombo. He had come closer to the stage and sent me a message to meet him for few minutes to which I agreed. This infuriated our leader.

while attending public seminars at the CSR.

His close connection with our family strengthened during the period of terror and repression in 1988-89, when he arranged for an Australian community to assist Chitra and the two children to visit Australia, while I had to find refuge in Japan due to death threats .

We cannot forget Fr Tissa's political activities in Canberra opposing the US led war in Iraq during one of his visits. Despite becoming frail due to age and sickness in recent years, he carried on with his work, promoting not only social justice but also religious and racial harmony.

We salute him for his immense contribution for the betterment of society. He will be remembered with gratitude. . . Fr Tissa's struggle for social justice will continue and be strengthened by his peerless example.

This is an adapted version of the article in Groundviews (19 January 2013 <http://groundviews.org/2013/01/19/father-tissa-balasuriyas-struggle-for-social-justice-will-continue-in-sri-lanka/>)

St. Maria Skobtsova

We live in the most unequal part of the world, which has grown the most, yet reduced misery the least. The unjust distribution of goods persists, creating a situation of social sin that cries out to Heaven and limits the possibilities of a fuller life for so many of our brothers and sisters.

Pope Francis

At the Last Judgment I shall not be asked whether I was successful in my ascetic exercises, nor how many bows and prostrations I made. Instead I shall be asked if I fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoners.

There is an immediate problem in doing this, because the armed conflict between the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan government and the Tamil people (not just the armed Tamil militants) was conducted with few witnesses.

The United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) appointed an Expert Panel to report on the conflict but even after the end of it, no independent observers have been allowed into the country, let alone into the traditional Tamil areas.

The current ground situation

Due to the government imposed exclusion of independent reporters and observers into the area, strict media censorship and regular threats, information about the current situation is always limited. Reliable information is only available from a few sources such as Bishop Rayappu Joseph (Catholic diocese of Mannar in the North East) and his clergy.

Tamil ‘Civil Society’, a detailed paper tabled in the Sri Lankan Parliament by the elected representatives of the Tamil people, the Tamil National Alliance and publications from internationally reputed human rights groups also provide reliable information.

The International Crisis Group has expressed grave concern for the number of rapes of Tamil women and girls by both the military and Sinhalese civilians who are being resettled in large numbers into traditional Tamil areas.

There are also accounts of “round ups” of young Tamil men by the military in remote areas, brutal assaults, torture and indefinite detention. Tamil men are being rounded up for “slave labour” to clear jungle areas for the encroaching Sinhalese settlements..

This constant brutal intimidation is designed to fragment the Tamil communities and drive them

away from their traditional ancestral lands, thus depriving them of their means of growing food and their livelihoods

All Tamil areas are now under military occupation and Sri Lanka is effectively a military/police state. The military can do what it wants with no accountability. Every human rights group in the world including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Geneva-based International Crisis Group, has called for an independent international investigation into the atrocities committed.

Large areas of land previously owned by the Tamils and Muslims have been taken over by the Government and declared “High Security Zones” and ‘Special Economic Zones’ now inaccessible to the rightful owners.

So far about a million Tamils have already been driven out or have voluntarily left – some as asylum seekers and refugees. Some 300,000 are virtually “non-people” in the North and East, unable to return to their own homes and villages to resume their own livelihood. In short, the civil war has left the Tamil population decimated: many thousands have lost their lands and therefore their means of support; families have been depleted by deaths and disappearances; widows and orphans left behind; women shamed and outcast by rape; the surviving children traumatised by years of war.

This is the Sri Lanka many Tamils have sought to flee.

Asylum Seekers: What should be Australia’s Response?

The Australian Government continues to focus on “people smugglers” but the problem is not the people smugglers, who have existed since time immemorial, but the injustice, persecution and killing which drives people unwillingly from

their own land.

Nor are the Tamil asylum seekers “queue jumpers” because, in Sri Lanka as in many other countries, there is no queue as there is no means of applying for refugee status within the country.

New legislation deprives those released into the community on a Bridging Visa the right to work, thus condemning them to poverty. At the same time Australia has spent \$2.4 billion on detention centres on the mainland, Christmas Island, Manus Island and Nauru.

Australia has refused to confront the human rights tragedy which has unfolded in Sri Lanka over the years since Independence. It has confidently hidden behind “terrorist” labels as an excuse for not criticising the Sri Lankan Government. It has welcomed Sri Lankan Government officials and embassy staff to Canberra.

The Australian Government has refused refugee status to a number of Tamils and sent them back to almost certain torture, detention and possible death. There are currently a number Tamil men languishing in inhuman conditions on Nauru and many more in detention on the mainland and others in the community, living in fear of being returned.

My earnest hope is that we find the will and the courage to address the pain and suffering of my own people: both in Sri Lanka and those languishing in detention in Australia.

Fr Pancras Jordan OP is convener of Pax Christi Queensland.

APOLOGY

Our apologies for giving the wrong date for Michael Henry's date of birth in the last issue of Disarming Times. The correct date is 29 May 1936.

JAPAN'S PEACE CONSTITUTION UNDER ATTACK

By Yoshioka Tatsuya and Celine Nahory

Young activists express support for Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution

Photograph:
Stacy Hughes / Peace Boat



In the past few months, Japan has been experiencing political changes, notably with the December 2012 re-election of Abe Shinzo, a key figure of Japan's ideological conservative right, as the country's Prime Minister.

This development threatens to have a drastic impact on Japan's longstanding war-renouncing policies in the international arena.

During his first tenure as Prime Minister in 2006-2007, Abe ardently pushed for the revision of Article 9 of Japan's Constitution in the name of building a "strong Japan". Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution is the famous peace clause, which renounces war as a means of settling international disputes and prohibits the maintenance of armed forces and other war potential.

Abe's track record includes a series of decisions aimed at curtailing the scope of Japan's peace clause, notably the creation of the Ministry of Defence, attempts to re-interpret Article 9 to expand the mandates of Self-Defence Forces' missions and allow collective action, as well as, some will even say, encourage the debate over Japan's acquiring of nuclear weapons.

Back in power, Abe is determined to push his agenda for-

ward. One of his first moves has been to order the bolstering of the country's military and announce an increase of 40 billion yen (\$440 million) in defense spending – the first increase in 11 years.

He has also made clear that he intends to revise defense guidelines with the US, which would like to incorporate Japan's SDF into its global military strategy, and turn Japan's Self-Defense Force (SDF) into a full-fledged national army.

Japan's Peace Constitution threatened

Indeed, Prime Minister Abe has made no secret of his intention to push for constitutional revisions, notably of war-renouncing Article 9, as well as of many other peace and human rights dispositions.

In fact, last April, before Abe returned to power, his conservative Liberal Democratic Party prepared a new draft constitution, with the changes it would like to see adopted as part of its broader agenda "to reclaim Japanese sovereignty" by getting rid of the current constitution, which, according to Abe, fails "to provide a necessary condition for an independent nation".

Changes proposed in the LDP's draft include: deleting "the right to live in peace, free from

want and fear" granted in the current preamble; removing Article 97, which guarantees fundamental human rights and the supremacy of the constitution; increasing the Emperor's powers; limiting the freedom of speech "for the purpose of defending the public interest and public order"; loosening the prohibition to inflict torture and inhuman treatments; revising human rights provisions to place them in the context of "the State's history, culture and tradition"; curtailing the independence of the judiciary from political control; and imposing a number of obligations on the people, such as respecting the flag and national anthem, obeying commands from the State.

The draft further insists that people have responsibilities and obligations towards the state in counterpart for enjoying freedoms and rights.

But it is no secret that one of Abe's priorities is to amend Japan's peace clause – Article 9.

Article 9 - a pledge to the world

Japan adopted its war-renouncing constitution following World War II, with Article 9 as a promise to itself and a pledge to the world, particularly neighboring countries that suffered under Japanese invasions and colonial rule, to never repeat its mistakes.

However, despite the restrictions of Article 9, Japan's SDF have gradually expanded over the years, making Japan's military budget the world's sixth largest and one of the biggest and most advanced militaries in Asia.

They have also – in a long list of controversial and constitutionally questionable activities – provided support to US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, carried anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia, opened a military base in Djibouti.

Yet, Article 9 and the Japanese people's support for its principles have acted as a restraint against the further militarization of Japan and forced the government, in its national policies, to abide by several key principles anchored in the spirit of its peace clause.

These famously include: the **Three Non Nuclear Principles**– of not possessing or producing nuclear weapons or allowing them on its territory – that were first announced by then Prime Minister Eisaku Sato in 1967 and for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1974; the **Three Principles in Arms Export** that generally prohibit the export of arms and weapons; and, to some extent, the principle of so-called “*Exclusively Defensive Defence*.”

In other words, Japan's Article 9 is not just a provision of the Japanese law. It also acts as a regional and international peace mechanism towards reducing military spending, supporting conflict prevention, mitigating the negative environmental impact of the military, ending violence against women, and more.

In July 2005, the UN-convened **Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict** (GPPAC) submitted an action agenda for Northeast Asia that declared that "Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution has been the foundation for collective security for the entire Asia Pacific region." Launched in 2005 by a coalition of

civil society organizations in Japan, the **Global Article 9 Campaign** seeks not only to locally protect Article 9 and build a society based on peace and security that do not rely on force.

The campaign also acts to educate people around the world about existing international peace mechanisms such as Japan's Constitution and encourage governments to work towards disarmament, demilitarization and a culture of peace.

At the international level, a strong international network of NGOs and individuals, including Nobel Peace Laureates and key international figures, has formed in support of the campaign. This growing international movement and support makes clear that the world values Article 9 as an ideal to which all people aspire, and as model to follow. . .

Since then, the Campaign engages in advocacy efforts at the international level, highlighting the global impact of Article 9, notably in the fields of Conflict Prevention, Disarmament for Development, the reduction of military spending, the codification of the Human Right to Peace, as well as the promotion of Peace Constitutions.

Today, Japan's peace movement is seeking the urgent support of those who wish for peace, for Japan's peace constitution and against the Japanese government's trend of nationalism and its path to militarism that would have grave consequences for Japan, the regional context and international peace.

Article 9 gives hope – hope that another world is possible. Should Japan renounce its peace clause, the world would take a step back in realizing this vision.

First published in openDemocracy, 23 May 2011
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/yoshioka-tatsuya-celine-nahory/japans-peace-pledge-under-attack>

Reflections on the Past Year

By Claude Mostowik

Pax Christi grew out of a search for peace after the Second World War, specifically to seek reconciliation between Germany and France. We have focused for much of our history on wars between countries and conflicts between peoples, seeking to find a resolution to these conflicts and bring about peace.

There might be a tendency to think of war as it has occurred in recent years in Iraq and Afghanistan without considering a larger, ongoing war. It is the war against the earth (Derrick Jensen and Vandana Shiva). The wars against Iraq and Afghanistan and now the neo-colonisation of Africa, dubbed ‘war on terror’, are really wars for resources.

Need for Resistance

Will we challenge an economic and social system – the military-industrial complex - that is at war with the planet? Tweaking at the edges by buying hybrid cars, recycling or optimistically relying on renewal energy are not enough – because none of it is renewable.

For ‘sustainable’ to mean anything, we must embrace and then defend the bare truth: the planet is primary. The life-producing work of a million species is literally the earth, air, and water that we depend on.

If there is to be a decent future, we have to give up on the imperial fantasy of endless power, the capitalist fantasy of endless growth, the technological fantasy of endless comfort. For those not fearful of the word – we need a ‘new spirituality of peace’ that steers away from conflict to one earth-centred.

The paradigm shift, the spirituality of peace, must begin with the recognition that we are part of nature. We do not own it, we are not its masters. We must see ourselves as members of the earth family, with the responsibility of caring for other species and life on earth in all its diversity.

THE YEAR 2012-2013

I have been Convenor of Pax Christi Australia (NSW) since 2001 and serve as President of Pax Christi Australia, director of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Justice and Peace Centre; research and publications officer at the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education.

Pax Christi and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Justice and Peace Centre also network in some capacity with the Australian Anti Bases Campaign Coalition, Action for Peace and Development in the Philippines, the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (NSW) Social Justice Committee, Australian Catholic Religious against Trafficking in Humans, Stanford House, Gethsemane House, Peace and Justice Commission of the NSW Ecumenical Council, Pace e Bene and the Community Justice Coalition.

We connect with or network with any people or groups who seek non-violent alternatives for the transformation of the local or wider community. We do this irrespective of their religious beliefs or no beliefs.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan continues to confront us with the injustice of innocent people continuing to suffer in various ways at the hands of the Australian, US and NATO forces. Clearly most Afghan people want the foreigners out. The violence in Afghanistan continues as foreign forces talk of leaving Afghanistan and handing over security to the Afghan forces.

The work of Voices for Peace in collaboration with the Afghan Youth Volunteers for Peace, and people such as Malalai Joya, who told us about the patriarchal attitudes of her leaders, are inspiring though mainstream media do

not carry these stories. They challenge us to peace and remind us that any talk of peace must walk.

Drones

The increasing use of drones – pilotless aircraft – in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen and now in the Niger are increasingly alarming. They are the weapon of choice in the current phase of the endless ‘war on terror’. American citizens outside the United States are also subject to summary execution by drone.

We need to continue to hammer our politicians with the moral implications of drone warfare. This is remote-controlled war from home. It also reflects a mindless policy that is on automatic pilot. And as these drone flights increase, so too does the tally of so-called ‘bad guys’, and so too does public inattention.

Pacific Calling Partnership

We continue our links with the Pacific Calling Partnership (PCP) which operates out of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education. This partnership that grew out of a call for solidarity and support from the peoples of the Pacific, whose island nations, livelihood, and culture were threatened by climate change, has grown in number but also in recognition and respect by government and nongovernment agencies.

In November/December I was able to accompany people from Kiribati and Tuvalu to the two week UN Conference on Climate Change in Doha, Qatar. It was both disappointing and hopeful. Disappointing that we have now had 18 of these conferences and coming to a 19th in Warsaw this year without significant sense of urgency about the consequence of climate change, and the hope that so many people and organisations around the world were on the ground to bring about a change in awareness, knowledge and behaviour.

Refugees

The plight of asylum seekers continues to be before us. This issue continues to rip through our society as it becomes a political weapon used by many in our parliament. It strikes at

our humanity as people in situations of extreme violence are refused entry to Australia and sent to ‘detention’ centres off shore in the vain hope that this would deter people from taking the treacherous voyages to Australia by boat.

Community Justice Coalition

I have been with the Coalition for close to five years. One of our members of Pax Christi (NSW), Pearl Wymarra, has also joined this Coalition. She brings a wealth of experience to the both Pax Christi and the Community Justice Coalition as an Indigenous Australian particularly as a very large proportion of people in prison or juvenile detention are Indigenous, young, poor, limited in literacy and numeracy skills and in many cases also living with an intellectual or mental disability.

Action for Peace and Development in the Philippines

This was formed in Sydney in 2006 to bring to light many largely unknown issues facing the Filipino people. Over the last decade, over 1,000 Filipino civilians have either been murdered for political reasons by military death squads or killed by reckless bombings and shootings by military forces.

In recent times we have tried to bring to attention the activities of mining companies, including Australian companies that have led to environmental degradation, dispossession of peasants and farmers.

Aotearoa-New Zealand Pax Christi

We continue to work towards forging closer ties with our sisters and brothers in Aotearoa-New Zealand Pax Christi. Kevin McBride has been our regional representative on the Executive Committee of Pax Christi International in Brussels and has brought the concerns of the region to the Executive Committee.

Australian Militarism

Of great concern is increasing militarisation in Australia which is expressed by the unquestioning ties we forge with the United States. This militarism is not new and is seen in the number of US bases in Australia

the number of US bases in Australia as well as the Talisman Sabre war games held in Queensland biennially, and the deployment of US troops in Darwin without consultation with the Australian people. I have written papers for the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education on this issue dealing with Guam, the Cocos-Keeling Islands (Australia's Indian Ocean) and more recently Jeju Island in South Korea (see the previous issue of *Disarming Times*).

This militarism is seen in the portrayal of fatalities in Afghanistan among Australian military personnel and the way ANZAC is increasingly commemorated. We are reminded by these deaths of great sacrifices made by military men and women and their families in order to bring lasting and enduring peace to Afghanistan without questioning the effects of our presence on the local people.

Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition

Apart from the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition, few voices argue for a reduction in military spending in Australia. The coalition has been active in trying to break the silence on the cost of Australia's military build-up. Excessive military spending makes us poorer, not safer.

Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education

I continue to work here two days a week in publications and research. Just Comment, treats topics of current importance which can be found on the website www.erg.org.au under publications and Just Comment.

Appreciation

As we continue to meet on the first Monday of each month beginning with a simple meal, some prayer and reflection, and carry on the business of Pax Christi, we welcome other members of Pax Christi to come when they can. We would welcome more members – and we know that many are quietly active in their own places. We also look forward to welcoming younger members to Pax Christi.

I am personally grateful for the unique contribution and dedication of our members: Sister Marie Therese Nilon, Secretary, Ric Baxter, Treas-

urer, Maggie Galley, Gill Burrows, Pearl Wymarra, Fleur Herscovitch, Margaret Armstrong, Peter Griffin, Frank Vavasour, Clare Maguire, Christina Demos-Jones, Peter Herborn and Sister Ann Laidlaw. I am grateful for their support, commitment, energy and gracious spirit.

I wish again to acknowledge the contribution of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart to the work of Pax Christi Australia [NSW] and Pax Christi Australia. Without their contribution it would not be possible to travel to meetings and gatherings or host the Pax Christi meetings. My thanks to Father Barry Brundell msc, parish priest of St Mary's Parish Erskineville, who has for some years allowed us use of the church for the Annual General Meeting and the parish house for our monthly Pax Christi meetings.

This is an abridged version of the Annual Report presented by Fr Claude Mostowik as Convener of Pax Christi (NSW).

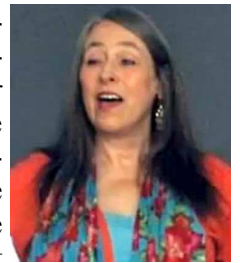
WES HOWARD-BROOK & SUE FERGUSON JOHNSON



Wes Howard-Brook has been teaching, writing and living at the intersection of church, academy and the world since 1988. After a career as an attorney for the US federal government and Washington state governments, Wes left law practice in 1985 to earn a Master of Divinity degree at Seattle University. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, he was part of Galilee Circle, an ecumenical Christian small community, which sought to live the radical Word of the Gospel in both personal and public ways, including a series of nonviolent direct actions at various private and public places of warmaking and imperial violence.

Sue Ferguson Johnson is a spiritual director of individuals, couples, and groups, and a retreat leader and Scripture teacher of many years'

experience. Formerly a psychologist, Sue left her practice to engage in full-time ministry in 2002. Sue was raised in the United Methodist Church, but with Wes is now at home in the Mennonite Church, where she has been instrumental in reshaping the local church from a committee model to a prayer-Scripture-discernment model. With Wes, she cowrote a Pax Christi USA Lent Reflection booklet.



Together, Wes and Sue share the ministry "**Abide in Me**" grounded in the imagery from the Gospel of John that calls disciples to integrate the inner and outer, the mystical and prophetic, the private and public journeys. Every Thursday since September 2004, they have hosted a John's gospel group in their home, where 25 individuals join for prayer, study, laughter and communion. After over eight years of gathering, they are nearing the end of John's gospel!

Advocating the need to integrate the inner and the outer, the mystical and prophetic, the private and public journeys. Wes & Sue will use their skills as academic teachers, and spiritual directors as well as their experiences in living in community and engaging in activism to help us explore the competing religions of empire and creation. They have worked extensively with Pax Christi USA.

Past actions include an exorcism at the Boeing Development Center, a blood-and-ashes witness on the USS New Jersey several actions at the at the Bangor Submarine Base over the years, and others at the Seattle Federal Building.

Wes & Sue will visit Brisbane Sydney & Melbourne in July to lead a series of Retreats and Workshops including a Pax Christi Workshop in Melbourne (see back page).

For details of their programme

contact Dale Hess:

dhess@ozemail.com.au;

Simon Reeves:

simon.reeves81@gmail.com;

or Gill Burrows:

Gill.burrows@ozburrows.com



PAX CHRISTI AUSTRALIA NATIONAL CONFERENCE
Sydney 2013

PEACEMAKING, AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE

EDMUND RICE CENTRE
15 HENLEY ROAD HOMEBUSH WEST

- **FRIDAY EVENING AUGUST 23 6.30 p.m—9.00 p.m.**
WELCOME—FOCUS—SOCIAL GATHERING
- **SATURDAY AUGUST 24 9.00AM** ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND REFLECTION— PEARL WYMARRA
- **9.30AM—5.30 p.m.** PRESENTATIONS BY PETER HERBORN
- **SESSION ONE: MAKING SENSE OF OUR PAST AS PEACEMAKERS**
- **SESSION TWO: BEYOND TERROR: CHALLENGES FOR PEACEMAKERS**
- **SESSION THREE WORKING FOR A PEACEFUL FUTURE**
- **SESSION FOUR SHARING WHAT NOW?**
- **DINNER 6.30PM -10.30PM**
- **SUNDAY AUGUST 25 9.00 AM** PRESENTATION BY FR NELES TEBAY
NEWLY APPOINTED MEMBER OF
PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE.
- **11.AM** PAX CHRISTI GENERAL MEETING
- **12 P.M.** WORSHIP LUNCH & CLOSE

Peter Herborn has worked as a professional town planner and as an academic in urban geography, environmental planning and peace studies in five universities in New South Wales and has been a visiting academic in four universities in the United States and England. He is a member of Pax Christi NSW and a Councillor of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at Sydney University.. In recent years he has presented research at the conferences of the International Peace Research Association with Dr Frank Hutchinson and has published in the international journal Futures and has contributed to the Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace.

FULL REGISTRATION WITH DINNER \$70 (LOW INCOME \$50)
FULL REGISTRATION WITHOUT DINNER \$60 (LOW INCOME \$40)

SATURDAY ONLY REGISTRATIONS \$50

Limited billeted accommodation will be available on request.
Accommodation information will follow.

Registrations will be required by 17 August 2013

NOTICE BOARD

NEW SOUTH WALES

Pax Christi Meetings

We normally meet on the First Monday of each month at 6.00pm for shared meal that members bring and the meeting follows at 6.30 pm.

**Contact: Claude Mostowik
(02) 9550 3845 or 0411 450 953**

Venue: MSC Justice and Peace Centre, 21 Swanson Street, Erskineville (2 minutes walk from Erskineville Station)

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

PEACEMAKING, AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE

**August 23-25
Sydney**

Full details page 11

**Pax Christi National Council
Meets on Skype no less**

than bimonthly
for issues of national import
Contact:

02 9550 3845
0411 450 953

QUEENSLAND

**Pax Christi Meetings
Pax Christi Queensland**

Branch meets monthly.

Contact:

**Pancras Jordan OP
0415 461 620
panjordan@yahoo.com**

**Claire Cooke SSPS
mcc1@holy.spirit.com.au**

VICTORIA

Agapes and Public Forums

**August Agape
Sunday 18 August**

*St. John's Uniting
Church*

*Glenhuntly Road
Elsternwick*

1 p.m—4 p.m.

Bring Food to share.

Topic TBA

Dař Christí Dícíria

**Invites you to
an Evening with
Wes Howard Brook and
Susan Ferguson Johnson**

*Claiming our Identity
as "Children of God"*

*A challenge for
Pax Christi*

*Who are we as
Australian Peacemakers*

- Who are we now after many years of activism with the energy running low?
- In a community which seems indifferent and uninteresting.
- How is God's spirit forming us at this time for what lies ahead?

This is NOT another strategy session. It is an attempt to go deeper, to stand back and reflect on what God is doing through us, though the wider peace movement in the Australia of 2013

**TUESDAY 16 July 2013
6 p.m until 9.15 p.m.
including a break for food.
at Kildara, rear 39 Stanhope Street, Malvern. Vic**

Please bring food to share

We invite you to contribute \$20 (\$15 low income or what you can) towards to cost of bringing Wes & Sue to Australia (see page 10).

I/We wish to apply for or renew membership of the International Christian Peace Movement - Pax Christi Australia. (Membership is from January to December)

Please tick box if you wish to receive your copy of Disarming Times by e-mail

Name..... Address.....

.....Pcode.....Phone.....

Email..... Mobile.....

ENCLOSED: \$..... (Single \$35; Concession \$10; Family \$45)

**Please return to: Your State Branch Treasurer (see address on page 2)
or PO Box 31 Carlton South Victoria 3053**