



Church and Peace

International Office

Church and Peace - the ecumenical peace church network of communities, training centres, peace organisations and peace service agencies in Europe

Church and Peace celebrates 70 years of active peace work in Europe with a ceremony in Berlin

Berlin, 19 May 2019 – *About 150 people from peace churches, peace organisations, communities, friends and guests - from 10 denominations and Christian traditions and 14 countries - met to mark the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the European ecumenical network Church and Peace. They gathered on 18 May for a ceremony in the Reformation Church of Moabit in Berlin to celebrate the network's past, present and future with the theme 'I will give you future and hope' (Jeremiah 29:11) - 70 years of living nonviolence and resisting militarisation'.*

In 1949, dialogue began between the historic peace churches (the Mennonites, Quakers, and the Church of the Brethren), the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the World Council of Churches on differences regarding a consistent theology and practice of peace. It was this dialogue which later led to the founding of Church and Peace. In her welcoming address, the chair, Antje Heider-Rottwilm, pointed out that this is still a controversial issue today. "In spite of the (ecumenical) paradigm shift from just war to just peace, which is so important ... the 'mainstream churches' are still moving very cautiously and timidly away from the justification of military violence as ultima ratio to nonviolent conflict transformation as both prima and ultima ratio."

In his address, Ambassador Dr. Volker Berresheim from the Federal Foreign Office emphasized that Church and Peace is particularly important where politics reaches its limits, i.e. where prevention of the escalation of violence or overcoming religious and cultural conflicts is concerned. It is often people in religious communities who are trusted and who build trust as a basis for reconciliation.

Bishop Dr. Dr. h.c. Markus Dröge, EKBO (*Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia*), highlighted that: "Today forces which seemed to have long been overcome are becoming strong again. Every country, every people seems to be anxiously concerned about establishing their place in tomorrow's world ... and they are throwing overboard so much, in terms of rapprochement and agreements between powers and political forces, which has been worked out through constructive negotiations in order to secure peace. The European peace project is turning into talk of "us" and "them" once again ... That is why I am thankful for your commitment, which has served steadily over so many years to promote peace."

Catherine Tsavdaridou of the Ecumenical Patriarchate delivered greetings from the Conference of European Churches (CEC) to "such a valuable partner organisation". As moderator of the Thematic Working Group on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, she has worked very closely with Church and Peace and has depended on the "expertise, motivation, but most of all perseverance, in serving peace and nonviolence in Europe ... Church and Peace has been instrumental within the Conference of European Churches in calling on the

European institutions to prioritise peacebuilding and reconciliation instead of militarisation of the European Union."

Jan Gildemeister, Director of the Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF), thanked Church and Peace for "70 years of continuous peace work and the important impulses which have come out of this work - for AGDF as well."

The network also received written greetings from the peace commissioner of the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany), Renke Brahm: "I hope and wish that Church and Peace will continue to be just as committed and passionately involved in our societies and churches in the future".

Olav Fykse-Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, stressed that for him Church and Peace was synonymous with "obedient discipleship in Christ and a prophetic witness for peace and nonviolent action ... You constantly remind the ecumenical movement of the preferential option for nonviolence as a response to Christ's love and God's gift of justice and peace as signs of God's reign to come."

Hildegard Goss-Mayr, who, on behalf of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, has contributed to nonviolent solutions in wars and conflicts in many countries, encouraged Church and Peace to intensify dialogue with Islam "in order to discover and teach common elements of faith which foster peace and to implement these in practical ways in personal and social life".

The evening's programme was devoted to the question "What is needed for peace in Europe and beyond? What role can Church and Peace play?" Six speakers were asked to shed light on current fields of active peace witness in Europe from their perspective: Steve Rauhut from Refo Moabit, a member of the young community which is active in the locality; Rebecca Froese, a climate researcher at the Rhineland-Palatinate Peace Academy; Yasser Almaamoun from the Centre for Political Beauty in Berlin; Nadežda Mojsilović from interreligious and interethnic (youth) work in Sarajevo; Andreas Zumach as a journalist on the escalation of the nuclear threat; and Andrew Lane from the Quaker Council for European Affairs in Brussels.

The commitment of the members of Church and Peace became visible in all its diversity through a wide variety of contributions which also pointed to key areas of work for the future. Among other things, it was decided to intensify efforts for nuclear disarmament once again. In this context, people from the western Balkans reported on the long-term consequences of the bombing of Serbia with uranium-enriched ammunition 20 years ago. Others spoke about the effects of the "silent wars", especially in Africa, over uranium.

On 19 May, one week before the European elections, participants of the Church and Peace General Assembly joined the demonstration "1 Europe for All" in Berlin as a sign of their commitment to the European peace project. They spoke out against nationalism and in favour of democratic, social and nonviolent living together in Europe and throughout the world.