



“Peace is the fruit of Justice”

Statement of the secretaries general of national commissions of Justice and Peace Europe gathered on May 14th - 15th 2022 in Szombathely/Hungary

On 24 February 2022 the Russian government launched a brutal and undeclared invasion of Ukraine. Like many civil society actors, Justice and Peace Europe immediately condemned the Russian aggression¹. Today, as secretaries general of Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe we reaffirm on the foundation of our Christian values and convictions that whilst diplomacy remains essential, some principles are non-negotiable, in particular respect for the dignity of every human being, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and the imperative of non-aggression, which is the basis for peaceful coexistence.

A just peace² cannot be established by depriving victims of their rights and rewarding the aggressor for violating fundamental principles of international law. All war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law must be consistently processed as a pre-condition to healing and reconciliation. Catholic Social Teaching on peace explicitly supports the individual and collective right to self-defense enshrined in international law.³ This also includes the right of the aggressed state to request support from third parties to ensure its defense. From our perspective, therefore, Ukraine's right to defend itself is indisputable and all arms deliveries that enable its defense within the framework of the imperatives of proportionality and international humanitarian law are legitimate.

As Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe, it is our task to accompany these developments with discernment. We want to emphasize that military means, in themselves, cannot bring lasting peace. They bear great risks of escalation. It is essential therefore to avoid the rhetoric of war and to maintain multi-channel and multilateral diplomatic efforts. In addition, decisions on arms deliveries must be strictly last resort, based on human rights and humanitarian principles. The economic interests of the weapons industry must not interfere. Conflict resolution and prevention as well disarmament should also remain goals in the future.

¹ See the statement of executive committee of Justice and Peace Europe from 25 February: <http://www.juspaxeu.org/en/dokumente/220225-JPE-ExCo-Ukraine.pdf>

² We recall what Saint Paul VI wrote in his message on the World Peace Day on 1st January 1972: “Peace is the fruit of Justice.” See also the speech of Saint John Paul II to the UN General Assembly on the 5th October 1995 and his call for the respect of the different cultures of each nation in the encyclical letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 15.

³ Cf; Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

As European countries, we must recognize our share of responsibility in this dire situation. We have largely ignored the warnings of several of Russia's neighboring countries about the threat of aggression, as well as the destruction and humanitarian catastrophes in Chechnya, Georgia and Syria. Efforts to advance joint, effective mechanisms for disarmament and global arms control have been insufficient. Furthermore, European countries need to acknowledge that, in other contexts and against the backdrop of presumed economic interests, we have neglected fundamental human rights and integral human development. Overall, instead of increasing our efforts for a comprehensive socio-ecological transformation, which is overdue because of the acute climate crisis, we have increased our dependence on fossil fuels, including those imported from Russia. For these shortcomings, we expressly apologize to our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and beyond. It is our individual and collective responsibility to change this course of action as quickly and consistently as possible.

During our meeting in Szombathely, the native city of the of Saint Martin, in Hungary, we, secretaries of national Justice and Peace commissions in Europe, heard the testimonies of some impressive Christians who can serve as models for us in these difficult times: Blessed János Brenner stood up for charity and his deep Christian faith. Living in truth, he was perceived as a threat by the Hungarian communist regime and suffered martyrdom. Blessed Vilmos Apor stood up for the poorest and the persecuted throughout his life and gave his life when he stood in the way of Russian soldiers to save women from being abducted and raped. Blessed Ladislaus Batthyány-Strattmann dedicated his life to the vocation of caring for the poorest and most neglected as a doctor. The example of these Christians in the face of trials and even persecution can inspire us to be courageous in the measures we take to respond to this aggression and war. They teach us that we must not make decisions out of fear and complacency, but that as Christians we are always called to focus on the poorest and the most vulnerable in the first place.

We therefore commit to work tirelessly in responding to needs, upholding rights, and for a renewed Europe. In the current situation we hope that

1. the war will end as soon as possible and that it will end with a free, secure and independent Ukraine in its internationally recognized borders, a home for each of its citizens whatever his or her language, religious affiliation, ethnic background or nationality.
2. sufficient aid is provided for internally displaced persons and that refugee hosting countries will have the endurance to persevere with their gracious hospitality so that the people displaced from Ukraine receive continued and generous accompaniment.
3. beyond Ukraine, our nations will show strong solidarity with those people and regions of the world most affected by the exacerbation of the worldwide food crisis⁴

⁴ Before the war, Russia and Ukraine accounted for 25% of global wheat export. The conflict has put great pressures on the production and delivery of wheat and other food products. It significantly worsens the fate of the estimated 800 million persons suffering from hunger and of the 2 billion considered food vulnerable.

and the utmost diplomatic and cooperation efforts are immediately engaged to get food to the hungry.

4. we Europeans will have the wisdom to systematically place the alleviation of suffering above concerns for our own prosperity and be able to prove our resilience and endurance, that, at the same time, the burden will be shared fairly, and excess profits used to support the poorest.
5. Ukrainians, with international support (ICRC, OSCE, Joint Investigation Teams), have the strength to gather evidence and reports about violations of human rights law, war crimes and crimes against humanity; that they get the resources to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators, for unsanctioned heinous crimes encourage and haunt countries for generations.
6. the dead, civilian and military on both sides, are duly remembered; and that the surviving victims and families are adequately compensated and cared for; that memory is preserved in a spirit of reconciliation.
7. in Europe fears to engage a radical personal and collective transition towards the decarbonization are transcended; and that the leaders of the European Union accelerate the Green Deal, because decoupling from fossil energies is essential, not only to regain leeway from Russia and other authoritarian regimes but also to meet our obligations to future generations.
8. the leaders of the European Union will support Ukraine's reconstruction and grant Ukraine candidate status at the upcoming European Council in June, taking also into account the aspirations of other European countries, especially in the Western Balkans, to become full members, and that a process for a new collective reinforced security architecture for Europe is engaged.
9. the United Nations recover sufficient strength to act as an effective instrument for conflict resolution and multilateral diplomacy and to enforce the respect of the UN Charter and of humanitarian law through the International Criminal court.
10. where peoples and peace are threatened by aggression and war, Churches and their representatives will act more closely together and with other religious communities for justice and peace in the world.
11. the extraordinary strength of ecumenical prayers for peace will continue to be a ray of light in a war-torn world.

The Executive Committee and national secretaries general of Justice and Peace Europe

Szombathely, 15 May 2022