

A Pledge of Prayer, A Call for Pilgrimage and A Commitment to Pursue a Just Peace

Holy Land Co-ordination Jerusalem, 10th - 13th January 2011 Final Communiqué

We have gathered for the eleventh time in the Holy Land to show, by sharing and exchanging our experiences and hopes, the love and solidarity of Catholics in our home countries for the Land of our Saviour, for the holy places and, in a special way, for the people who make up the community of believers here. This year we have had a particular focus on meeting with all Christian Confessions. Our calling as Christians is to build bridges and our shared hope is to bring all Christians together in the search for a just peace for all in this land. We were also pleased to come together with the Ordinaries of the Holy Land.

It has been encouraging for us to reflect on what Pope Benedict has written about the Holy Land:

The more we appreciate the universality and the uniqueness of Christ's person, the more we look with gratitude to that land where Jesus was born, where he lived and where he gave his life for us. The stones on which our Redeemer walked are still charged with his memory and continue to 'cry out' the Good News. For this reason, the Synod Fathers recalled the felicitous phrase which speaks of the Holy Land as 'the Fifth Gospel'. How important it is that in these places there be Christian communities, notwithstanding any number of hardships! The Synod of Bishops expressed profound closeness to all those Christians who dwell in the land of Jesus and bear witness to their faith in the Risen One¹.

Come and see

We believe that every visit to the Holy Land brings benefits both to pilgrims and the people who live here, especially the Christian community. When John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus where He lived, he did not answer them directly but urged them to "Come and see"². They did, and it changed their lives. Our time in the Holy Land has changed us as well. We leave with a renewed commitment to prayer with and for our brother bishops, the Christian Community and all the people of the Holy land. We pledge to pray for a just peace and for the necessary steps to protect the lives, dignity, rights and religious freedom of all in the Middle East. We also encourage pilgrimages that visit the land where Jesus walked and the people continue to live out their faith.

We stand with those who desperately want to find ways of contributing to a situation of greater justice and peace where they see so much fear and mistrust, even hate and destruction. Despite some tangible improvements in the visa allocation, we have once again been made painfully aware of the frustration felt by some Catholic clergy and Religious whose daily tasks are made difficult by restrictions on their movement. Our brother Bishops have told us with sadness that the Pope's words during his visit in 2009 to allow ease of movement for Catholic clergy and Religious seem to have gone unheard. We strongly urge a conclusion to the lengthy negotiations between the Holy See and the State of Israel. We have also been

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Rome, 30th September 2010, No. 89.

² *John* 1,39.

made aware of the suffering of those people whose marriages are put under enormous strain by the demands of “security” and religious differences, by individuals and communities whose land and property has been damaged or taken from them, including by the route and construction of the wall, and by the people whose lives are made so difficult by the situation where they live in Gaza.

We know that there are improvements in some areas, and Palestinian prime minister Fayyad told us of the encouraging news that the most recent data shows that more Palestinians are returning than leaving, but we are deeply concerned at too many cases where people’s dignity is ignored or insulted. So we commit ourselves to stand with agents of justice and peacemakers here in the Holy Land and to seek to encourage and persuade leaders and people in our own nations to join them. We will continue to work for a lasting peace by supporting a genuine two state solution with security and recognition for the state and people of Israel and a viable and independent state for Palestinians. We will work for a future where the lives, dignity and rights of both Palestinians and Israelis are protected and respected.

What is to be done?

We shall continue to call our fellow-Catholics to pray for our brothers and sisters in this Land and we will also inform other interested people of what we have learned. We shall continue conversations with diplomats and politicians at home to share the concerns of the Christian communities we have met.

We also call on others to join us in these commitments. Religious leaders can all influence how their co-religionists view people who do not share their beliefs and they, like us, need to show greater courage and responsibility in leadership. Those who teach children have a special responsibility in helping young minds grow in respect for the rights and the dignity of every person God has created, irrespective of their beliefs, their culture or their nationality. We have been greatly encouraged by the witness of those Religious who work in schools helping to create a better future.

Those who govern the different parts of the Holy Land need to summon the will and find the ways to take courageous steps for justice and peace. The leaders of our own nations whose international policies have important effects here have inescapable responsibilities to help bring about a just peace and protect the rights of believers and all people in these lands. Journalists, too, know how powerful their words can be, and we call on them to report on the difficulties, but also those signs of hope.

We pray that the Lord may indeed give strength to his people and bless his people, all his people, with peace³, especially in the land we all call holy.

ENDS

³ Cf. Psalm 29,11.

Signatories to the communiqué

Archbishop Patrick Kelly

Archbishop of Liverpool,
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Archbishop Rock Mirdita

Archbishop of Tirana Durazzo
Bishops' Conference of Albania

Bishop William Kenney

Bishop of European Affairs
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Bishop Pierre Morissette

Bishop of St Jerome
Canadian Bishops' Conference

Bishop Michel Dubost

Bishop of Evry
French Bishops' Conference

Bishop Peter Bürcher

Bishop of Reykjavik and representative of the Nordic Bishops Conference

Bishop Dr. Stephan Ackermann

Bishop of Trier and president of the German Commission for Justice and Peace
German Bishops' Conference

The following Bishops are part of the Holy Land Co-ordination but had to leave early this year.

Bishop Gerald Kicanas

Bishop of Tucson
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Archbishop Joan-Enric Vives

Archbishop of Urgell and Co-Prince of Andorra
Bishops' Conference of Spain