

Overcoming fear to defend human rights

The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justice and Peace Europe) is committed to the respect and the promotion of human rights so that each person and each community can live with dignity. Human rights have been recognized in International Declarations, Treaties, Constitutions, Laws and multiple documents. The climate of fear in Europe, which has resulted from numerous terrorist attacks, makes us worrying about a loss of fundamental rights due to measures of counter-terrorism. Without any hesitation we claim the universal character of these rights and adopted the statement below at our General Assembly on 25 September 2017 in Taizé/France.

What happens to human rights when fear is paralyzing us? Democracy demands life and dialogue in the public square, says *Michel Walzer*. Another social scientist, *Hughes Lagrange* addresses "derivative" fear as a sense of permanent vulnerability whether a menace is immediately present or not. *Zygmunt Bauman*, in his book "Liquid Fear" explains what makes fear powerful, which is precisely that feeling of uncertainty, of not knowing where to stand, of not knowing when or how it will affect us. This means that if we can identify the danger we already recover the capacity to react, either by confronting it or by fleeing. On the hand if we do not know the danger we are more vulnerable. Those who seed fear know this. Terrorists know this.

In the Gospel Jesus ceaselessly tells us not to be afraid. It is an invitation to follow him and to identify with Him and his preference for those who are poor and vulnerable. The Acts of the Apostles holds a parable for us that invites us to overcome fear. The text of Pentecost exemplifies a community enclosed by fear that, when it experiences the action of the Holy Spirit, it is able to transform itself and to emerge as Church which anticipates the expected Kingdom of God and in which every person is understood speaking his own language.

Overcoming fear to defend human rights is the consequence of a deep conversion that leads to live fraternity each other and between peoples.

The Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights evokes a humanity in which every human being enjoys "freedom from fear and want". The omnipresence of fear and misery in today's world challenges the construction of a welcoming society where respectful dialogue among cultures and religions is the norm and goods and services are shared in solidarity among people and through appropriate institutions.

We need a culture that respects every human being, favors the common good, avoiding any discrimination, looking at the otherness of each person as part of ourselves. A culture worthy of this name rejects all expressions of injustice and cultivates the ethical base for fully respecting human dignity.

We are called to dialogue, in the meaning of its Greek philosophical origins deepest Greek sense. It is the search for truth through the word, understood as an effective action, whose outcome determines our future. As Pope Francis said in his Apostolic Journey to Egypt dialogue can be favored by combining three fundamental indications: “The duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others, because true dialogue cannot be built on ambiguity or a willingness to sacrifice some good for the sake of pleasing others; the courage to accept differences, because those who are different, either culturally or religiously, should not be seen or treated as enemies, but rather welcomed as fellow pilgrims, in the genuine conviction that the good of each resides in the good of all; and the “sincerity of intentions, because dialogue, as an authentic expression of our humanity, is not a strategy for achieving specific goals, but rather a path to truth, one that deserves to be undertaken patiently, in order to transform competition into cooperation”.¹

The respectful openness and sincere dialogue with others, recognizing their fundamental rights and freedoms, especially religious freedom, is the best way to jointly build the future, to recover CITIZENSHIP with capital letters. It is also the key to the utopian promise, which is supreme Love and the good news of the Gospel. Because, as Pope Francis says, the only alternative to the incivility of conflict is the civility of encounter; there is no other way. “To counter effectively the barbarity of those who foment hatred and violence, we need to accompany young people, helping them on the path to maturity and teaching them to respond to the incendiary logic of evil by patiently working for the growth of goodness”.²

Note: The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justice and Peace Europe) is a European network of 31 national Justice and Peace Commissions, working for the promotion of justice, peace, respect for human dignity and the care of creation. It contributes to raising awareness of the catholic social doctrine in the European societies and the European institutions.

The Executive Committee of Justice and Peace Europe is composed of 9 elected members and its President is Mgr. Jean-Claude Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg.

Contact: secretary@juspax-eu.org; www.juspax-eu.org

¹ Cf. The address of his Holiness Pope Francis to the participants in the International peace Conference at the Al-Azhar Conference Centre, 28 April 2017 in Cairo

² Ibid.