

## “The Need for Truth”

*Marija, as an eighteen year old polytechnic student was captured by the KGB because her brother was a member of the underground insurgency army. While no one knew where she was, Marija was subjected to ten days of interrogation, without rest or sleep. Still trying to find her brother, the KGB ambushed her house. Her Father was shot and her younger brother and sister sent into exile. Marija spent twenty five years in a concentration camp.*

We, the Members of the European Conference of Justice and Peace, as a network of 31 national Justice and Peace Commissions mandated by their Bishops Conferences to speak out on behalf of Poverty Fighting, Human Rights, Peace, Reconciliation and Development, participated in a workshop “Unity in precarious diversity” at Kyiv, in the Ukraine on 21-23 September 2007, at the invitation gratitude of the Ukrainian Commission for Justice and Peace.

We came to the Ukraine to discover and experience the situation in a country which has suffered a troubled past. Our lack of knowledge made it important for us to learn about Ukraine’s history. This we did through lectures, visits and meetings.

Meeting people who were victims of the most terrible repressions and atrocity was at the same time painful and inspiring. We heard about the great famine, political and military repression, the forced displacement of the Crimean-Tartars, the tragedy of Bykivnia and the massacre of Babyn Yar. We learnt that the gaining of Independence does not automatically and instantaneously come with the cessation of repression.

We were touched by the way people dealt with their past and grateful with their openness in sharing their stories with us. These stories must be told, and told now in order not to be forgotten. They are part of the national memory. The need for significant places to reflect and mourn, to acknowledge the truth and give voice to past events, became increasingly evident.

The latest catastrophe to befall this troubled nation is that of the nuclear explosion at Chernobyl. This is a catastrophe for the whole of Europe and for the whole of mankind. In Pripjat we took the opportunity to pray and reflect about the extent of this tragedy. Coming to terms with the past is a complex and demanding process and learning from it is ongoing. To prevent the repetition of past mistakes and injustices our learning should be drawn from our own and other people’s similar histories. For healing to begin and reconciliation be a possibility people need to face their fears and lay them aside. Peace between people and diverse religions could be a basis for dialogue and growth.

The ability to share and learn from each other is the responsibility of us all and will facilitate the particular process of reconciliation needed in the Ukraine. This underlines the importance of European contact and cooperation. The European Conference of Justice and Peace Commissions wants to, and is, playing an active part in making this possible. We learnt about the suffering and martyr low of the different churches