

Re-commitment to peace with justice

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The United Nations has called on all member states to observe 21 September as the *International Day of Peace*. In the framework of its *Decade to Overcome Violence*, the World Council of Churches, associating itself with the international community, has called on its member churches to observe the same day as an *International Day of Prayer for Peace*.

Peace is a *gift* of God to humanity through the Incarnation of Christ. The birth of Christ was announced by the angels as the restoration of peace in this world. A God-given reality cannot be usurped by man. This is a sin against God.

Peace is a divine *promise*. It will be granted to those who are ready to accept it in humanity and obedience, and to preserve, enhance and enrich it as a sacred treasure.

Peace is also a God-given *mission* that must be fulfilled. Hence, peace-making is integral to the Christian vocation. It is an essential dimension of the proclamation of the Gospel.

Peace primarily means respect for *life*. This requires us to renounce violence against life and to preserve its sacredness and integrity.

Peace means doing *justice*. Justice is a *sine qua non* condition for peace. It is the only way to peace. True and permanent peace is undergirded by justice.

Peace means *accepting each other* the way we are, by respecting our differences and seeking common goals and values in the midst of differences.

Peace means *building community* by recognizing the rights and obligations of each other, and promoting creative interaction and coherent relationships.

Peace does not mean that enemies are conquered; it means that *enmity is overcome* through mutual

understanding and trust.

Peace does not mean absence of conflict, but *right relationships* with God, with neighbours, and with the creation. Peace prevails wherever and whenever there is freedom in truth (John 14:16), equality in justice (Col. 4:1), and harmony in life (1 John 4:8).

A vision of true peace rejects uni-lateralism and promotes multi-lateralism. It rejects all "ism"s that ignore the God-given gift of life, dignity, justice and freedom. It rejects all forms of governance that deny participation and community.

A vision of true peace strives for a society governed by the rule of law and sustained by basic moral values and fundamental human rights.

In a world torn apart by the rhetoric of hate, mistrust and alienation, the churches must become more vigorously engaged in peacemaking.

Religions are challenged to work together for a just, participatory and morally sustainable society. They are urged to promote dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions by leading humanity from a culture of death to a culture of life, from a culture of violence to a culture of peace.

Religions must support the United Nations in its attempt to transform its peace-keeping mandate into a peace-building mission. Such a mission implies addressing seriously the root causes of violence, hate and distrust, which have become dominant features of contemporary societies. It also implies advocating for justice by eradicating all forms of poverty, racism and ignorance.

This is the way to build peace.

The International Day of Prayer for Peace is a day of prayer and hope. It is also a day of re-committing ourselves to a *global covenant* for building peace with justice.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt. 5: 9).